

A Twist in the Story

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Adventure, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Hiccup

Status: Completed

Published: 2014-06-13 08:01:03

Updated: 2015-06-28 06:07:44

Packaged: 2016-04-26 19:05:42

Rating: T

Chapters: 41

Words: 42,180

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Stoic thought his son was a traitorous runaway. Then he saw what he went through. Cast Watches the Film Story, with plenty of twists. Don't own.

1. Gobber

****Hello, just a warning before you begin reading. Due to the nature of this story, there will be a little formatting difficulty later on with the order of the chapters. If you wish to read the unbroken story just read them in order and skip all chapters after 32. If, however, you wish to know how Stoic and the rest of the Vikings react to chapters 19-25, that information is included in the chapters after 32. They will be titled according to which chapter they correspond to. More details about this will be given later.****

Gobber left the stall for the day and locked it behind him, mourning the fact that he no longer could leave it open, knowing Hiccup would close up shop after he'd finished whatever project his almost-son was working on. He walked over to the mead hall, which at times doubled as a meeting hall since it was the only building large enough to house the whole village at once. Perhaps he could drown his sorrows for a while.

He grabbed a tankard and plate of chicken and sat down at a table. The cloud of misery surrounding the man, still lingering from Hiccup's disownment from over two months ago, prevented others from nearing him. Grief was best dealt with alone and with large quantities of drink.

As the man stared into his half-full tankard, he noticed the upside-down images playing on the surface of the liquid and looked up at the adjacent wall. His eyes widened as the image of rippling water sped by his face, and was about to turn around and ask the others if they saw this when a voice greeted his ears.

"This is Berk." It was Hiccup's voice. Hiccup, the disgraced Viking that no one listened to even before he was cast out. Gobber dropped the idea of alerting the others and watched the image in front of him as it rose up the cliffs and revealed the village. _Well, he learned sarcasm well enough, _thought the old veteran as he laughed at Hiccup's comments about both the island and its inhabitants. His remark about the "charming Viking demeanor was particularly funny, especially given the circumstances surrounding it.

The battle he remembered well enough. It had been the last large conflict before this present calm, the longest they'd ever experienced. Some of the villagers missed the constant chance to show off their skills, but Gobber was just glad none of the others were getting hurt. He'd seen enough injuries to last a lifetime.

Then, his own face appeared, and he bittersweetly noticed the banter between him and his young charge. No one else traded words with him like the boy once had, and probably no one would again. A chuckle escaped him at Hiccup's description as he thought to himself, _meathead indeed. At least I'm not a toothpick. _When the other teens entered the scene, he couldn't help but smile at the lovestruck tones his apprentice used to describe Astrid. The boy had had no hope of catching her eye, even before the dragon incident. Oh well, who was he to tell the fishbone to stop dreaming?

But the next conversation perturbed him slightly. Had he been too harsh? The boy was doing his best with what he had. Maybe his invention would have worked if Gobber had given it a proper chance. And then, when he began categorizing the different kinds of dragon kills, Gobber realized just how little he thought of himself.

Hiccup was noticed, just not in ways he could see. People loved his metalwork, even if they didn't know it was Hiccup's handiwork. Astrid's axe didn't fail once after he sharpened it. Helmets hammered out by him fit better and didn't bend nearly as easily. The gronkle comment made sense. No girl would look twice at the boy, but once he'd grown into himself they would have taken at least some notice, right?

And since when did the boy need status? He was the chief's son for Thor's sake! It wasn't as if someone could steal his birthright. Hiccup was completely right about the Nightmare, though. You didn't go after one of those unless you were a genius or a fool. Mostly a fool, and if you were you didn't come back whole, if you did at all. Hiccup was smart not to try and take one on, in Gobber's opinion.

But something about the way he described the Night Fury bugged the double amputee. If he accepted its status as the greatest prize, why had he been riding one instead of hoisting its head on a pike? There was more to the story, Gobber was sure of it.

And then he had to leave his accident-prone apprentice with a thirst to prove himself alone with an open door and a Night Fury flying out waiting to be shot down by Hiccup's invention. Maybe what happened to the village wasn't entirely Hiccup's fault. But then Hiccup found the empty hillside, primed his weapon, and waited for the black beast. Gobber could feel the tension in the air. Something was about to happen.

And something did. Hiccup shot down the Night Fury. Gobber felt elated for his apprentice during his brief moment of celebration, and suddenly understood his chagrin at the situation after the conclusion of the battle. Hiccup had been telling the truth and no one had listened. Not even Gobber, the person who obviously knew him best, a fruit of the many hours they'd spent together at the forge. Yes. They had all underestimated the smith-in-training. Was it really that unbelievable that he'd found someone else to listen? Someone who actually gave him a chance?

These thoughts made him bite his lip as he watched his friend Stoic publicly humiliate his only son. Really, could the man not wait until they were in private to tell him off? He probably felt bad enough already! That's why he was trying to cover it up with smart remarks, the way he did whenever he got burned at the forge.

Then the teens ridiculed him and Gobber wondered why his on-screen self wasn't telling them off. Then he remembered that his on-screen self didn't know that Hiccup had been telling the truth about the night fury and just thought Hiccup was making excuses. Well, the next time he heard someone bad-mouthing his student, Gobber would be sure to remember this. He wanted to turn around right at the moment and start yelling at people and Stoic in particular, but the moving picture in front of him kept his attention.

****Welcome to a very different approach to the standard "Viking cast watches the movie" story. I promise lots of twists and a few surprises, along with as regular of updates as I can make.****

****What I can't promise is uniform chapter sizes. Usually, I try to make each chapter over a thousand words, but I wanted to go scene-by-scene with this, and some of those are just too short to get that many words out of.****

****I Love reviews, always have, always will, and the first person to review gets a sneak peak at the first twist in the story.****

2. Stoic

Shame welled up inside Stoic as he watched his son, dejected, walk back towards the house with Gobber in tow. He had thrown his son to the dogs with no fatherly understanding or love to protect him from the tearing jabs of his peers, and now he had to listen to Hiccup as he laid bare Stoic's failures as a father.

"I really did hit one." Yes, Hiccup had hit one and Stoic hadn't trusted him enough to believe him.

"He never listens." No, Stoic hadn't listened when Hiccup had tried to explain his actions. And the worst part was that this hadn't been the first time. What if, when Hiccup had wrecked one of the bridges, his son had been telling the truth and he'd actually been trying to improve it.

And what about the time when Hiccup couldn't find his best hammer and had asked Stoic about it? He'd brushed off his son's concern with nothing more than a "Look for it tomorrow." It had taken Hiccup three days to find it, and Snotlout, who'd taken it in the first place for a mean prank, had let him find it with one end slammed into his

stomach where the burly teen had whacked him. But when Hiccup came home with the bruises from the beating and tried to talk to his dad about it, did Stoic listen? Of course not.

Stoic tried to snap himself out of it. This was the son who'd betrayed him and everyone else. Bonding with dragons. His son was one of them, not his son at all. But his hardened expression didn't last past the next sentence.

"And when he does, it's always with this disappointed scowl, like someone skimped on the meat in his sandwich." Stoic watched as his son did a painful imitation of his father. How could he have let Hiccup think of him like that? Unloving, disappointed? Granted, he had reason to be the latter, but that did not mean he didn't love his beanpole of a son, and he should never have let the lad believe otherwise.

But Stoic expressed himself with praise. That was how he showed affection. Hiccup just never did anything worthy of praise. So, really, Stoic's apparent lack of affection was really the boy's fault because he gave Stoic an outlet to use to express it. Right?

Wrong! Gobber shouted at him from the screen. You hate your son and everyone knows it! But how it hurt that such a declaration from his friend was only answered by casual sarcasm, as if Hiccup was already aware of the fact that his own father couldn't stand everything about him.

"I just wanna be one of you guys." But he wasn't and both he and Stoic knew it. _Is that why you went to the dragons? _Thought the distraught father. _Were you one of them?_

There you go, my second chapter and first Stoic-centric one. I can't believe the response this is getting, it's amazing!

Speaking of amazing, I say the sequel today. Go. Watch. It. Seriously, I'm going to go back and see that again.

I love reviews, and the first person to comment gets a sneak peak on a twist! Don't worry, I have plenty.

3. Astrid

Astrid shifted in her seat as she stared at the reflective shield where the image of Hiccup once again running off changed to a sweeping movement inside the great hall. There was nothing wrong with her actions. She'd left Hiccup alone, hadn't spoken to him at all. No teasing, nothing. So she had nothing to feel bad about. Right?

He was right about the Dragon hunts. They needed to make a preemptive strike against their enemy and attacking the nest was the best way to do so. She was raring to go on her own hunt next season, if her parents would allow it. Oh, she couldn't wait to get her first taste of dragon blood, and a few battle scars wouldn't be remiss either.

But everyone else seemed to hesitate. They'd just had a fourth of their flock stolen. So why did they not want to annihilate the

perpetrators? When everyone raised their hands after Stoic's threat about Hiccup, she frowned indignantly. So, they wouldn't fight for their own honor but throw Hiccup in as incentive and suddenly everyone wanted to go? What were they, Romans? They were Vikings! Stoic was right, this was an occupational hazard.

Her indignant frown quickly became a glare as Stoic talked to Gobber about the training. "New recruits"? Not her in particular? Everyone knew she was the best of the teens, and she was being lumped in with the _twins_!? And then to hear that Hiccup would be in her class, it just made her angry all over again.

But her petty anger faded as he began criticizing his own son. Okay, maybe the boy didn't listen on occasion, but that was no reason to assume he couldn't focus! Some of the inventions she'd seen were useful and his metalwork wasn't bad.

Wait, had she just thought that? This was Hiccup the Traitor she was thinking about and, gods forbid, sympathizing with. And then Stoic had to go and set that ridiculously high standard. Hiccup could be a passable Viking, but what the chief was expecting was ridiculous. Splitting rocks with your skull? Leveling forests? Who could even do those things in the first place? It was little wonder Stoic was constantly disappointed by his son with ridiculous expectations like that!

Then Gobber started talking and Astrid snorted into her mug. Preparation, her axe blade. This coming from the man who taught while a dragon was breathing down his students' neck. But then she had to laugh at the accuracy of his statement. Sure enough, the next scene was Hiccup getting into trouble again. She sat back to enjoy it.

****There you are, third chapter. Getting a better idea of how this is going to work?****

****As usual, the first person to review gets a twist reveal. And thanks for all the comments! Out of all the stories I've written this is the only one that has gotten such a positive response, probably because of when I published it. ****

4. Enter Toothless

Stoic couldn't keep a smile off his face as he watched his frustrated son as he crossed out yet another area on his makeshift map. The boy really did have some talent with his hands, to be able to draw like that.

"No, not me. I managed to lose an entire dragon!" A snort accompanied the statement and, for the first time since he'd begun watching the strange tale, Stoic looked around and saw Gobber sitting at a nearby table, staring at the wall in front of him. A much larger version of the same thing Stoic had been watching was in front of Gobber who apparently could hear Hiccup as well, and had laughed at the boy's dry sense of humor.

He got up and walked over to his old friend, joining him on the bench in front of the image. To his surprise, the rectangular moving picture widened to give him a better view and the volume increased so

he could hear the casual music in the back. Gobber glanced up and raised an eyebrow as if to say, _what do you think of this? _Stoic shrugged in reply. _Let's just see where this goes. _The blond man let out a dismissive snort and turned back to the screen, where Hiccup proceeded to nearly poke his eye out with a branch.

The two men's chuckles at his bad luck were stifled as the sinister music brought a feeling of foreboding into the scene. That trench wasn't man made; it was too ragged for that. The ominous music sent shivers down both their spines as Hiccup walked down the trench and inspected the claw marks, approaching the end when, suddenly, the truth was revealed.

_So that's a Night Fury, _thought Stoic as he watched his son approach the great beast. It was a beautiful animal, with strong legs and wings, covered in black hide and scales that would protect it like chain mail and cloak it in the night. But it didn't look particularly ferocious, not with slightly dull claws and no teeth outside the lips, like a Nightmare's. It looked like a skyfighter, not something that would win hand to hand unless it used its fire. That was devastating enough to make up for its other less than satisfactory weaponry.

Why hadn't he noticed that when Hiccup rode it into the ring on the day he was supposed to kill the Nightmare? _I'd been too angry to notice much of anything, especially not the cause of it, _he thought with a twinge of guilt. If he had missed details about the dragon, what had he missed about his son?

Gobber finished admiring the wings when the view skimmed past them and up to the dragon's head. Those floppy things on its head looked like a cross between horns, ears, and frills. He wondered at what function they served. Balance, perhaps? Or to make it more suited to flying? Then he stopped wondering as the view showed the dragon's open eye.

Most of it was a bright green, the same color as Hiccup's eyes. The pupils were widened slightly, looking more intelligent than either man had expected. And, when he again came into view, it became obvious that Hiccup saw all of that and more.

The boy had the knife all ready, but he kept hesitating every time he looked into the dragon's eye. His spoken reasons were little more than excuses and Stoic wanted to hit themselves for trying to hammer that mentality into the boy's head when it obviously didn't suit his nature. Then he remembered a conversation he'd had about that same day with Hiccup and the boy had told him in at least two different ways that he couldn't kill dragons. It hadn't been a matter of skill. It had been a matter of heart. What had he done?

Gobber watched as the boy finally let the weapon drop and took a few steps back. He'd seen Hiccup look guilty many times, mostly after he'd messed up something, but this was different. The guilt was more consuming, as if he'd meant for this to happen and realized how wrong he had been. Gobber looked over at his friend and chief. They wore identical expressions. They were more alike than people thought.

Actually, they were a lot alike. Stubborn, bad listeners, same guilty conscience, it was all there. Then he chuckled in his throat,

thinking back to the first scene from the moving picture. When Stoic had thrown the net over the Nadders and Hiccup had slammed open his launcher, they'd made the exact same noise. Really, it was astounding how no one had seen it before, probably because no one looked long enough at Hiccup to see anything, except Gobber of course.

Then both men tensed as they heard a rope snap. Minds jolted out of their respective musings, they stared in growing horror at the image of Hiccup freeing a deadly and very angry dragon. What was he doing?! The instant that thing was free it was going to pounce on him and blast him! Honestly, did the boy have a death wish?!

Then the dragon was on him and both men jumped to their feet, ready to take action, until they remembered that it was only an image and Hiccup clearly hadn't actually died in the encounter. Giving each other slightly sheepish looks, Gobber and Stoic sat back down, but still tense. Fists clenched around their drinks or under the table, pulses racing, the blacksmith and chief watched as one's son and the other's apprentice stared absolute death in the face, only to get off with just a scream from the dragon in question. When it flew off, Gobber was so relieved that he let go of the tankard he'd manhandled into an odd shape and Stoic relaxed his hand and inspected the row of small cuts where his fingernails had accidentally cut into his palms. It seemed Hiccup shared their relief, as he fainted a few seconds later. Stoic laughed.

But Gobber was thinking hard about what had happened right after the scream and just before Hiccup fainted. The dragon had flown off, but crookedly, and had banged into things along the way. So why, when Hiccup came to show him to all the Vikings, did he fly straight and with incredible speed and control? What had crippled him in the first place? Perhaps the next scene would answer some of his questions.

****As always, I love reviews and promise a twist reveal to the first reviewer.****

5. Snotlout

Snotlout wiped his eyes. Typical Hiccup! He'd just faced down a dragon and the first thing he did was faint. The rest of the scene might have been pretty cool, Snotlout admitted, but that ending was just as clumsy and weak as his cousin.

The kid really was useless. He'd had the perfect opportunity. Fame, girls, respect, it could have been his if he'd just brought back that stupid dragon's head! Instead, he had to let the winged beast go and grant him a perfect target! That was beyond stupid, and hilarious to watch!

Of course Hiccup the Useless got caught sneaking into his home. Snotlout's laughter faded as the tone grew somber, but started right back up again when they started talking over each other. Hiccup was always good for a laugh, that much he would admit. Then he watched in envy as Hiccup was handed the opportunity for Dragon Training.

Envy quickly changed to confusion. He didn't want it? Oh come on! Your dad, the chief, hands you a chance for glory and you turn it down? What was going through his cousin's head?

"Rephrase. Dad, I can't kill dragons." Oh. So this was about what had happened in the woods. It wasn't that Hiccup was weak, it was that he literally had tried and found himself lacking resolve. He was honestly admitting he had a fault and was trying to avoid embarrassing himself further. Snotlout had to respect that, at least a little. But then how had he ended up in the ring with them?

The next part of the conversation made that clear. Stoic didn't take no for an answer, and Snotlout had to feel at least a little pity for his cousin. Whenever he had issues, like he needed more time to train for the Thaw Fest Games, his dad listened, at least, while he spoke. Stoic wasn't doing that.

"No more ofâ€|this." Ow. It was one thing when Gobber said that, but to have your own dad say that to you, after you pretty much knew it to be true? That had to hurt. He had to admire Hiccup for hiding that pain below a layer of sarcasm. Snotlout never stood up well under criticism. It was one of the reasons he drove himself so hard, to avoid doing anything that would invite remarks likeâ€| well, like what Stoic had just said to Hiccup.

Odin help him. He'd been doing the exact same thing to Hiccup since they were old enough to understand how different Hiccup was. And yet he barely flinched at the insults, where Snotlout would have served up a couple knuckle sandwiches. That scrawny kid had a thick skin. He even finished the conversation with sarcasm. Impressive.

See? Even Snotlout's human. Lots of people just write him as a bully, but I had a feeling there had to be something underneath all that.

I saw the sequel two times in two days. It is just that good. I totally recommend seeing it.

I love reviews, and the first person to do so gets a twist reveal.

6. Welcome to Dragon Training

"Welcome to dragon training!" Gobber's voice rang in Astrid's ears, bringing with the corresponding memory jog. She remembered this lesson. She watched in the polished metal of a decorative axe hanging on the wall as she and the other kids wished for their first battle scars. She took a gulp from the drink in her handâ€|

"Pain. Love it"

And spat it back out in a fit of chocking triggered by the water going down the wrong way in shock. Where in Valhalla had that sarcasm come from? She coughed through most of his conversation with Gobber and recovered enough to hear Fishlegs begin spouting statistics.

_That boy had to be the most annoying of the lot, _thought the training tutor himself as he watched his other self finally tell the boy off and get him to shut up, only to become indignant when he continued in a whisper. He would have to give that bulky nerd a piece of his mind the next time he saw the big teen.

Astrid sneered at Snotlout's cowardly remarks. For all that bluster, he sure didn't want to put his mettle to the test. Even Hiccup wasn't complaining. Hold on. Why wasn't he?

Come to think of it, after the remark that lost her a mouthful of drink, he hadn't complained, whined, or even spoken. And he didn't seem all that shocked by Gobber's teaching methods. Suddenly, Astrid wanted to hit herself for her stupidity. Hiccup had been the apprentice smith. Therefore, he would be more than familiar with his master's teaching methods, and know how to deal with them effectively without getting hurt. The shield maiden leaned forward and prepared to scrutinize every aspect of the brunette's behavior during the lesson.

The smith was of much the same mind, but on a different subject. That Night Fury had not gone for the kill when it had had the chance. In fact, in all his years teaching, the dragons preferred to disable their victims instead of killing them. They wouldn't have over half their warriors if this wasn't true. So he fixed his eyes on the gronkle currently scrambling with its legs against the stone floor of the arena, trying to get back in the air. Either this lesson would prove his theory, or smash it into smaller bits than a Viking warhammer.

The first thing the young woman noticed about Hiccup's actions was that he followed every order Gobber gave as quickly as he could and as exactly as he could. The blond Viking may have helped him pick up his shield, but the whacking he was doing with the axe to produce clanging was completely his own actions and, now that she thought of the purpose of the lesson, survival, hiding seemed like a very good idea. Of course, the minute the smith told him otherwise, he was back on the field, following instructions and trying to stay alive. While Snotlout attempted flirting, Hiccup actually learned the lesson. She would need to think about this.

But the "meathead", as Hiccup had so affectionately labeled him, was not interested in his students' antics. No, it was the flying canon that has his attention, most specifically its aim. The first shot was very accurately placed between the squabbling twins, hurting neither of them but destroying the shield, crippling their ability to get close enough to the dragon to hurt it. Gobber doubted the beast was realizing what it was doing, but if it wasn't deciding its actions, what was?

Instinct, perhaps, or practiced behaviors from years in the ring. Since Nightmares were the only ones meant to be killed in the lessons, they were also the only ones that needed to be replaced on a regular basis. It was a pain to try and get a new one for each set of schooling, but the glory was a big reason the recruits did so well and tried their best.

As he kept watching, the dragon's aim became more and more apparent. It didn't fire at defeated foes like the twins and Snotlout. It was only going after the Vikings who still had shields. In short, it was aiming for the shields. Somehow, the beast had been trained, or knew not to hit the teens. But then he almost fired point blank at Hiccup, and Gobber was even more confused than before. Were these dragons harmless or not, intelligent or not? He wished Hiccup was here to bounce ideas off of.

In fact, both the young girl and the burly man wanted to ask the boy questions. And mourned that he wasn't there to answer them.

**There you go, today's chapter. Even from the beginning, Hiccup was one of the better students because he actually tried to learn and didn't have another agenda (examples are the twins' rivalry and Snotlout's crush). I admit I got the Gronkle idea from a different author, but it worked so well with Gobber's character! **

I love reviews, and the first person will get a promised twist reveal! Thank you guys for all the encouragement! The number of favorites on this story is incredible!

7. The Twins

"So why didn't you?" The twins looked at each other and shrugged. Who cared, really? It wasn't as if Useless was worth killing, even if he did create some pretty great destruction. That last battle, he'd been amazing. All those ramps damaged, it was a field day for them. Quite the performance.

They switched their gaze from the other's face to the polished front of their helmets. Quickly growing bored at Hiccup's roaming, they were about to look back at each other's faces when he suddenly dropped into a new area. Hm.

Wow. There was an area ripe for messing around with and Hiccup had found it first? Even if it didn't look like much, it was way too peaceful with all the birds flying around it and chirping. There were plenty of walls to drop things off of and shove things up against, but not much else, just a pond.

"Well this was stupid." _My sentiments exactly, _thought Ruffnut. He reached down and picked up something black and shiny. Tuffnut's attention was immediately caught again. That looked very cool. Then both twins jolted unexpectedly when the black dragon suddenly appeared in the image, shocking the Hiccup on the helmets as well.

But instead of running off, he crept closer to get a better look. Tuffnut watched the series of jumps with a bit of interest. He had to admit, the kid had guts for sticking around with a Night Fury so close. Although he would never admit it, the male half of the duo would have been running away by this time.

Ruffnut watched as the Night Fury shot out a fire blast. Man, that thing was awesome, so much destructive power. Then Hiccup took out his journal. The two teens wondered what he could be doing until a moment later with he finished an accurate drawing of the black beast. They looked back down at each other, mouths slightly agape. _Hiccup could draw_?

"Why don't you justâ€¦fly away?" They looked back up at the image and watched as Hiccup inspected the beast again, compared it to the drawing in his hand, and rubbed out a portion of the tail. Wait, if that had been the same Fury he'd ridden into the ring and caused mass destruction with, why could it fly? They looked back down at each other shrugged, and waited for the next scene.

****And the twins make their entrance. Don't worry, you get Fishlegs next chapter. Who liked my helmet idea?****

****As usual, the first to review gets a twist reveal. I might have to dish out some of the more shocking ones soon.****

8. Fishlegs

Fishlegs was sitting with a chicken leg halfway to his mouth, aghast at the fact that Hiccup hadn't done what the Book of Dragons ordered and run. The boy's curiosity was equal to his own, possibly bigger. They could have had such a great time, talking about dragons and the different kinds together, possibly looking them up in the book that Fishlegs treated like the Holy Grail.

The next scene, outside the Mead Hall and with pouring rain, jogged the big teen's memories. Oh no. This was going to hurt.

It was the day he'd tried to share his knowledge with the others and been completely blown off. Why couldn't the twins understand the merits of the Book of Dragons? Snotlout was even worse.

"I mistimed my somersault dive. It was sloppy. It threw off my reverse tumble." Wow. Oh So Great Astrid was nitpicking her performance again. What good was a fancy somersault when a Whispering Death came up from underneath you? And what if you were fighting a Changewing and rolled into a puddle of acid by mistake? You had to know your enemy before fighting. But of course no one else thought that was more important than sword swinging.

And, of course, Snotlout had to butter her up and completely ignore the fact that she wasn't interested in him. Astrid made that quite clear with an eye roll that the blond teen didn't know she was possible of. Even Astrid got exasperated, who knew?

"Where did Hiccup go wrong?"

"Uh, he showed up." And what is wrong with that, Fishlegs wanted to ask the female of the pair. You showed up too. So did you go wrong the same way? He felt the same way about Ruffnut's remark. If you were going to insult someone, at least do it in such a way that you don't look like a moron.

But he stopped lamenting the twins' lack of half a brain when he noticed something. Their table was far from full, but Snotlout was deliberately moving around to fill the empty space as Hiccup walked by it.

Not that Hiccup should have taken a seat at their table. Snotlout would probably have bugged him through the whole meal or kicked him under the table. The others would probably have joined in, too, if only for the amusement. At least this way they were limited to verbal barbs, which didn't seem to have the great of an effect on the chief's son. He actually just grabbed some food and sat at the next table over, poking the chicken on the plate. Why wasn't he eating?

A closer look at the teen's face answered the question. People who are lonely, tired, and shameful generally don't have much of an

appetite, and all three of those expressions were written clearly on his face.

The reason for the first one was painfully obvious. Fishlegs had just seen the root of it after all, and been slightly shocked by his own part in it. So what if he thought Hiccup would be a decent person to discuss dragon lore with. He hadn't made a single move to turn the idea into reality, hanging out with the safer crowd of cool kids instead of making himself more vulnerable to teasing by befriending the village pariah. With a dad like Stoic and no friends, or human friends at least, there was no question about why his posture screamed loneliness.

And, of course, anyone would be tired after a training session like that with a hike through the woods and hair-raising experience such as that encounter with the downed night fury as a follow up. Maybe that was why he didn't fight the jabs with sarcasm like he usually did. It just wasn't worth the effort to come up with a response, especially since it usually went over the heads of the other teens anyway.

Before seeing this, however, Fishlegs would have assumed that the shame mixed in with the tired and lonely looks was due to his performance during the last raid and all the other fiascos before it. Now he knew that the emotion had much deeper causes. Hiccup had released a dragon. He had then followed said dragon and not made any hostile movements towards it. That pretty much went against the entire Viking code. Oh, and let's not forget that he was doing all of this behind his father's, the chief's, back. Oh, didn't that just add to the pile.

"The Dragon Manual. Everything we know about every dragon we know of." Yes! There it was, his favorite book, and the source of his expertise. Yes! This was the perfect chance to rope the others into his world for a change.

"Wait, you mean read?"

"While we're still alive?" And there they were, shooting down his hopes of an intellectual discussion before they could even properly form. Still, he had to give his image-self credit for trying. But he was trying with the wrong people, which became painfully apparent when the others ran off and Hiccup actually touched the book. Oh, why hadn't he stayed and taken his chances with Hiccup instead of trying to persuade the "cool Vikings" to try something new (unlikely, but still!)?

"So I guess we'll share?" Those words stuck in his ears like inch-long pins. How could he have ignored something so obvious right in front of him? And watching Hiccup's crestfallen expression as Astrid left him to his reading only made it worse.

Then Fishlegs watched as Hiccup began to discover the treasure trove that was the Dragon Manual. Flipping through the various entries, he stared at the pictures that flickered in the candlelight, giving the impression of movement. Ominous warning after ominous warning was voiced by the mellow tenor. Then, finally, he turned to the page he was looking for.

"Night Fury." He read the description with a suitably spooked voice,

finishing with the warning that he had clearly not obeyed earlier in the day. Although, Fishlegs now had to wonder at the wisdom of such a warning. Night Furies had never actually killed anyone, and Hiccup's encounters with the specimen in the woods had certainly proved many of the book's statements wrong. As Hiccup pulled out his sketchbook and laid it over the blank page, Fishlegs wondered if he could do more than that. Perhaps his fellow dragon nerd would be able to fill in the blanks about Night Furies and more. If only they hadn't driven him off.

****Someone Suggested that I should add more movie quotes to spice things up. How do you think I did?****

****Fishlegs might seem like a bit of a pushover in the movie, but the TV series made his character grow a real spine. That's where I got some of my ideas about his character. Tell me what you think!****

****Here's the Fishlegs chapter everyone wanted. Review, and get a twist reveal!****

9. Nadder Time

"I can almost smell them. They're close." _Awesome, _thought the burly teen as Snotlout glimpsed the ships sailing off into the fog. Oh, what he wouldn't give to be on one of those ships, taking dragonheads and winning respect.

Then the dragon screech startled him and he heard a loud clattering sound. He looked around to see if he'd knocked something over, then remembered that the sound had been much farther away from him. He looked over his shoulder and saw Fishlegs sitting at a different bench in the Mead Hall, watching the same thing on the reflective surface of a large rectangular shield, a trophy from one of their battles with the Romans.

He looked back at his own reflective image, a small area on his plate, and decided to switch to the one Fishlegs was watching. That was the only reason he was switching areas. It had nothing to do with the fact that he had been severely spooked by that dragon shadow swooping down and would feel better watching with someone else who was just as scared as him. It had nothing to do with that at all.

"A little Night Fury pamphlet?" Snotlout started laughing at Hiccup's horrible attempts to get more information, but was silenced when Fishlegs leveled a surprisingly intimidating look at him.

The blond teen actually thought it was smart of Hiccup to ask those questions. He'd never thought about it himself and just thought that the meager amount of information in the Dragon Manual was all there was to the black dragon. Of course, he didn't have personal experience with Night Furies, but that didn't mean he couldn't question the lack of information. But idolizing a book tended to discourage such thinking. Your idol had to be perfect, or it couldn't be your idol anymore.

Then both youths tensed as Hiccup's ax was blown to smithereens by the Nadder's fire. When the blue, birdlike dragon unleashed its spikes, Fishlegs flinched at the memory. That had been terrifying, to

say the least.

Snotlout looked over at the big teen with a sort of new respect. So the Encyclopedia could actually defend himself. Who knew? Both boys laughed heartily at the twins' horrible attempt to stay in the dragon's blind spot, a piece of information both tucked away for a later date. Fishlegs planned to add it to the book, and Snotlout catalogued it just in case he ever came face to face with one. Although, the likelihood of such an encounter now was slim, especially since they hadn't had an attack in over a month.

"So how would one sneak up on a Night Fury?" The boys leaned closer, hoping to find out the answer. Who knows, this might have been the secret to Hiccup's success training the thing. Then Snotlout shook his head emphatically. He was acting like he wanted to train one himself. That wasn't what Vikings did to dragons! Vikings killed dragons, everyone knew that! So why did he feel like he was hanging on Hiccup's every word?

While Snotlout was busy being frustrated with himself, Fishlegs was groaning at Hiccup's absurd attempt at a somersault. At least he avoided getting bitten long enough for the Nadder's attention to get transferred to Astrid and her currently flirting companion. So, of course the first thing Snotlout saw when he had calmed down enough to look at the screen was him making a fool of himself.

"What do you want me to do, block out the sun? I could do that, but I don't have time right now." The big teen gave his companion a look with Did you really just say that? written all over it. The black-haired teen cringed inwardly at the absurdness of the statement, but glared right back. He'd just been trying to salvage the situation! Besides, he was a man of muscle, not Hiccup. What would he have said? His cousin was never without a snappy or sarcastic comment that left your mind reeling. How would he have tried to resolve such an error?

"Maybe they take the daytime off! You, know, like a cat!" Leave it to Hiccup to still be asking questions even after a near-death experience with a giant lizard. Fishlegs laughed behind his hand at his fellow teen's antics. Then his face contorted when Astrid toppled off the top of one of that partitions that filled the arena and fell on top of Hiccup, ax jammed in his shield.

"Ooh, love on the battlefield." Both boys made a face at this comment, Fishlegs from disgust at the comment, Snotlout from the impossibility of the image. There was no way Mini-Freya Astrid would go for someone like Hiccup. You see? He was so lowly she was stepping on him, never mind the fact that she did so to get the shield and her ax off his arm and free to defend their lives with.

SMASH! The shield ax combo slammed into the skull of the Nadder, knocking the fight out of it. Once the danger was gone, the adrenaline visibly drained out of Astrid, making her tired and forcing her to realize what could have just happened as a result of Hiccup's antics. So, when she whirled around, Fishlegs and Snotlout prepared for her wrath to fall on the still crouched figure of their fellow teen.

"Is this some kind of a joke to you? Our parents' war is about to become ours'. Figure out which side you're on." Both boys flinched at

that and turned to each other, horrified looks on their faces. Astrid had just given Hiccup the ultimatum; for us or against us. Why did it feel like that single remark was the reason Hiccup left? They wouldn't be surprised if it was.

****You have no idea how much I wanted to post this yesterday. Havings such a great audience will do that to a girl. But, I'd rather you make you wait a day now that for a week in the future when I get writer's block.****

****There will be a lot more character interactions after this chapter. We have everyone's feelings about Hiccup out in the open now so I can afford to have a little more fun with the cast. ****

****Review please, and the first person to do so gets, not a twist reveal, but a question answered!****

10. Innocence

Stoic was tempted to laugh at the look on his son's face when he peaked over the edge of his shield. He looked like he was five years old again with that hesitant but still just this side of curious expression. He sighed. He hadn't seen that look in a long time, not since—well, since he'd started messing up on a more regular basis. Then he threw the fish through and tried to move forward, but the shield got stuck. He did laugh at that, heartily, and even more so as his son's frustration escalated with every attempt to pull the shield free from where it was completely jammed.

Then he picked up the fish and began looking around, not seeing the Night Fury anywhere. Then the image showed the dragon hiding behind a rock, ready to pounce. Stoic tensed under the table. What was that dragon plotting? Was it going to use some sort of magic to turn his son against him, against everyone?

But despite his fears, Hiccup caught sight of the beast in time to prevent it from doing anything underhanded. It climbed down from its perch—and stayed where it was.

Hiccup held out the fish—and the dragon changed. Completely.

Its eyes went from predatory to curious and slightly scared. The way it moved was like a cautious animal investigating something new. Then, in a mere moment, the predatory look returned, this time accompanied by a growl. Hiccup lifted his vest and exposed the small dagger he kept on his person at all times and the dragon's growls intensified. Stoic wanted to shout at his son to run, get out of there! But instead, Hiccup took the knife from his belt and dropped it.

Enraged by his son's actions, by his trust in the dragon's nonexistent mercy, Stoic stood up and turned to leave when he was stopped by a slim figure blocking his path. Astrid was standing right in front of him, staring him down chief. The look on her face was clear. She was challenging him to see this all the way through, however much he might not like or understand it. He would be cowardly to do anything less.

So, slowly, the massive redhead turned back around and fixed his eyes

back on the scene between his son and the black beast. There was a creak and he looked over to see that Astrid had joined them on the bench, next to her chief. She was making sure he wouldn't run away.

Astrid couldn't help the small bout of girly feelings that washed over her the minute the dragon relaxed. _I never thought I'd say this, but that dragon is adorable._ With those big green eyes, gigantic twitching ears, and open expression, he was possibly one of the cutest things she'd ever seen in her life. Hiccup held out the fish again and the gigantic black reptile approached like a small kitten. It opened its mouth, revealing a row of gums.

"Huh. Toothless. I could have sworn you hadâ€¦" The pearly whites shot out, jolting Astrid's eyes open even wider. Stoic thought for a second that, when the thing grabbed the fish, it got Hiccup's hand as well from the speed of the bite. The fish now swallowed, the image focused back on Hiccup who, to Stoic's relief, still had both hands intact. "Teeth."

Stoic relaxed for a moment, before the beast began backing his son up until he was pressed against the rock behind him. Was it planning to attack? Then Hiccup spoke and the chief relaxed. It just wanted more fish. When the beast regurgitated the back half of the fish, Astrid flinched. Why had it done that?

The beast sat back on its haunches, almost like a human. The intense stare it directed at the teen made it obvious it was waiting for Hiccup to do something. But what? Then it looked from Hiccup to the fish in the boy's lap. It didn'tâ€¦

Apparently it did. Hiccup was forced to take a bite out of the fish and, with much encouragement from the dragon, to swallow the bite. He smiled at the dragon, and Astrid noticed that one side of the grin was higher than the other.

Stoic watched as the beast cocked its head to the side, scrutinizing his still-smiling son. Then the image went back to the dragon as it began contorting its face. A few seconds later, Stoic was staring at one of the strangest things he'd ever seen. A dragon was attempting to smile. Stoic's hands slipped off the table as he stared at the opposite of everything he believed. A dragon that treated his son more like a person that he did.

Astrid watched as Hiccup extended his hand towards the grinning animal. There was something about him in that moment that she'd never seen before. He was smiling, but it wasn't weary or exasperated. In fact, there were no negative emotions at all.

Stoic watched as the dragon flew away from his son, lighting up the ground and lying down, almost catlike in its movements. Then the small bird flew from its nest and the dragon watched it with an open, intelligent gaze. Then it saw Hiccup sitting near him and Stoic could almost hear him thinking, _Oh great. It's that kid again._ And the beast put his tail in front of his face. The motion made the big man laugh in spite of himself. Who knew a dragon could have such a distinct personality?

Hiccup scooted closer to the dragon, a child's expression of friendly curiosity on his face. So unguarded, so open, soâ€¦happy. And Astrid

had never seen it before. It hurt inside to know that Hiccup couldn't be his real self around them for fear of being ridiculed and getting hurt. And then, when the dragon noticed his approaching hand and hoisted it away, the look of rejection was familiar, and at the same time not. She found herself smiling at the almost childish behavior of both boy and dragon.

And then, the two Vikings just stopped thinking altogether, and only felt as they beheld the forging of a bond neither could understand on a mental level but that touched them nonetheless. For Stoic, it was like going back through the years to when Hiccup was just his little boy and not a terror or accident waiting to happen. He was watching his son enjoy something as simple as a friend, who had no barrier to cross, no expectation to fill. All Hiccup did was attempt contact. And he got it.

Astrid wanted to cry. This was what Hiccup should have been. The sarcasm, the inventions, the clumsy excuses, it was all a front. They were walls Hiccup shouldn't have had to put up. He should have been accepted for who he was, who he was at the moment he touched the Night Fury. And it was the village's fault that he wasn't. What had they done?

****YES! This story has over 50 reviews! I want to scream it from the rooftops, I am so happy! ****

****If you think I should have done the ending, give me some ideas and I will. But right now I needed to focus on Stoic and Astrid. Hiccup will get plenty of spotlight later.****

****On that note, the first person to review gets a question answered, and sorry, you can only get that answer the day you review. Otherwise I forget who gets answers and who doesn't, although does it really matter since you'll all know soon anyway?****

11. Building

"And with one twist, he took my hand and swallowed it whole." The twins rolled their eyes. They remembered this. It had been one of the most boring conversations they'd had, although Ruffnut loved the part where he got to show off his tattoo. The story would have been cool if it had had more details, like how badly the dragon had to fight to get to Gobber's hands and how much stuff it wrecked in the process.

And then Fishlegs had to go and make that totally weird comment and spoil everyone's appetite. Well, not everyone's. Ruffnut laughed at her brother's I'm-bored-can-we-please-explode-something-now expression. Her twin, knowing what she was laughing at, punched her rather hard on her chest. In fact, he hit his sister so hard that she bent over backwards and saw, to her great surprise that the same thing she'd been watching on her brother's helmet was displayed much larger on a big Roman shield. She bent back into an upright position, pointed at the shield behind her that Snotlout and Fishlegs were looking at. He got the hint, so they grabbed their food and headed over to join their fellow teens watching.

"Every dragon I fight, with my face." Ruffnut turned and gave Snotlout the are-you-a-complete-moron look. How on earth did you even

chop off something with your face? Unless he was planning to bite it off. Ruffnut was game for that.

"If it can't fly, it can't get away. A downed dragon is a dead dragon." Oh man. No wonder Hiccup had looked so worried at that statement. He'd basically left his new friend to die! The teens mulled that over in their heads for a while, each in their own thoughts.

The twins didn't think about it very hard, mostly because they couldn't. But the same could not be said for their much larger companion. Eyebrows drawn together, Fishlegs contemplated the problem of how to save a dragon missing a tail fin because, somehow, Hiccup had done just that. He had ridden the thing off Berk, after all. Then he turned and looked at Snotlout who, to his surprise, had the same kind of half-worried, half-curious expression on his face. What had Hiccup done to resolve the problem?

And then both boys were jolted out of their thoughts by an annoying voice saying "It's my destiny. See?" Together, they turned and gave Tuffnut a perfect impersonation of his are-you-a-complete-moron look. The sight made Ruffnut laugh.

After all three had sufficiently laughed at the slightly embarrassed teen in their midst, they looked back at the screen to see Hiccup once again drawing in his notebook. Only this time, he was adjusting an earlier sketch. Fishlegs gasped. He was drawing in the tailfin on the Night Fury!

Snotlout watched as Hiccup pumped the bellows and hammered away. How was the runt able to do that at all? You needed muscle to shape metal. Then he thought of Astrid, the best ax thrower of their generation and with limbs almost as skinny as Hiccup's. Perhaps his cousin wasn't weak, just not trained with weapons. He was certainly a decent smith.

Fishlegs was admiring the attention to detail. The shape of the fin, the effort to make it light, the joints that moved like a real dragon's, it was all so cool! And Hiccup could tell all those things just from looking at the dragon and sketching it? That was pretty amazing!

Of course, the lack of obvious destruction was almost putting the twins to sleep, so they had no real thoughts on the matter of the created tailfin. So the other two boys did their best to ignore the two smaller blonds as the scene changed again.

****So there's the two groups of watchers. I cannot wait to finish up with canon so I can start on the new stuff! This story is now in two different communities, my first story ever to do so.****

****I cannot believe this whole time I had the twins backwards. Should I go back and change it or leave it there for kicks?****

****I love reviews, and the first person to do so gets a question answered! This story is so popular, I love it!****

"Hey Toothless? I brought breakfast." Stoic laughed to himself. Only his son would name the most fearsome dragon in the world something as harmless as Toothless. The name reminded him of his son, too. With only himself, Hiccup didn't amount to much as a warrior. But he was beginning to realize that if you gave the boy a problem and the means to come up with the solution, you would not believe your eyes when he was finished.

Astrid's eyebrows went up when she saw how much fish Hiccup had stowed in the basket. She might not have been able to lift the thing, let alone swing it around like the skinny teen was doing. And he'd been carrying his invention on top of that huge basket! Was it possible that Hiccup was actually very strong?

"Yeah, I don't really like eel much either." _True enough, _thought Gobber. He'd never seen that boy eat anything remotely resembling an eel. Now that the smith thought about it, he didn't like eel himself. The only time he'd ever eaten it, it had made him sick. All that slime must have been bad for his stomach. Maybe that was why dragons didn't like eels. Of course, his brilliant apprentice had found this out long before Gobber. But that was what happened when you had Hiccup for an apprentice.

"I'll just be back here, minding my own business." Snotlout laughed as the dragon, now named Toothless in ridiculous Hiccup fashion, evaded his attempts to buckle the tail on. Finally, he straddled the tail to keep it from moving, a good idea since he was finally able to successfully attach the leather contraption.

Fishlegs had a very bad feeling when he saw the dragon's wings opening. The twins let out a cackle when Toothless took off, trailing Hiccup like a leaf stuck on his tailfin. Then, to the blond boy's surprise, Snotlout elbowed Tuffnut in the ribs and nodded towards the image. Fishlegs looked back just in time to see Hiccup yank the tailfin open and finally let the Night Fury soar into the air.

Astrid couldn't believe her eyes. Hiccup was flying on dragonback and was completely cool with the whole thing. Either he was the craziest Viking kid Berk had ever seen, or the bravest. She was banking on both.

"Yes! Yes, I did it." Gobber heartily agreed. Out of all the inventions Hiccup had come up with over the years, from his early attempts at a self-sharpener as a gift for his father to the most recent one, the bola launcher, Hiccup had shown a talent for contraptions. This tail was one of his finest, but it would take a lot of tweaking to get it to work properly, especially since something had to hold it open during flights. Why did he have the strangest feeling that, when Hiccup was done with this particular invention, it would be something the likes of which the rest of the world had yet to see?

Stoic wasn't marveling at the tail, though. He was too deeply entrenched in his own guilt. All those times when Hiccup had created something and Stoic had brushed it aside because he had more pressing duties, or the odd thing his son was offering for inspection didn't look like much. How many of those inventions would have worked brilliantly, if only he'd taken the time to actually look at them and test them out?

Would it have really been so difficult to take that sliver of time out of his busy chief's day to have a look at what his son made? Other parents did. Astrid's mom tried every dish the less-than-stellar cook tried to whip up. Spitelout spent hours training, working with his son to build muscle on the lad.

His old excuses, that the other parents could share the duties with their spouses, not they weren't chief, that their children weren't Hiccup, they all rang hollow, especially that last one. Val would not have treated their son like this. None one should treat their son like this.

He didn't deserve a son like this. Like Hiccup. A boy who had only ever wanted his love and attention, and who had been denied it for so long he finally went in search of other sources. Then, as the big man looked at the dragon flashing its wings around in the lake, he began to feel grateful towards the big scaly beast. It had given Hiccup the things he never thought to. Perhaps Stoic could learn a thing or two about loving someone from his son's companion. But fat chance of that happening, after driving them off the island. He would be lucky if he ever saw either one of them again.

I'm ecstatic about the amount of positive attention this is getting! This is now by far my most popular story! And as such, I've gotten a few guest reviews I need to address, so bear with me.

Bearybeary-I will not do the clips or trailers for reasons that will become obvious in a few chapters, but I'm debating whether or not to include a music video.

Nottelling-All good things come to those who wait. And you have no idea how difficult these chapters are to write! So I cannot "hurry up and finish it" without decreasing the quality.

Thank you for all the wonderful encouragement! As usual, the first person to review gets a question answered.

13. Two-Headed Trouble

"Today is about teamwork." The dragon trainees, minus Astrid, watched as the arena filled with Hideous Zippleback gas. This had not been their proudest moment, although Tuffnut still thought Astrid hitting Snotlout was awesome to watch. The fact that he'd gotten a bucket to the face didn't matter much to him.

"Prefers ambush attack, crushing its victimsâ€|"

"Will you please stop that!?" Fishlegs had the grace to look sheepish. He really hadn't been helping the situation, even if the information would have been useful under different circumstances. For example, if they could actually see their enemy, they would know to avoid the teeth at all costs.

"I'm gonnaâ€|there!" Ruffnut raised an eyebrow at the image of her and Astrid hiding in the smoke. If she hadn't been dead set against saying her brother might be right about something for once, she would have noticed that the two girls on the shield actually did look a bit

like a dragon, and Monstrous Nightmare in particular. But of course, the boys forgot they were fighting a Zippleback in their eagerness to win the training session, after the last two ended in disaster. But her brother still deserved the bucket to the face. Totally.

The teens flinched as one when Tuffnut got pulled into the thick blanket of gas. That, combined with the shocked sounds, had all of them thoroughly spooked, even if they did remember himâ€¦

Charging out exclaiming about how injured he was. This freaked out the two remaining trainees, Hiccup and Fishlegs, even more. The bigger teen started spouting off statistics in nervousness, while the brunette's face molded into a grimace. The head appeared, finally, and all four groaned when the gas spewed out of its mouth, marking it as the wrong head. Then Hiccup aimed his bucket.

It was at that moment that Snotlout noticed something important. Out of all the trainees, Hiccup was the only one who got close to defeating it using the conventional methods. He and Tuffnut had been too eager, and Ruffnut had let her anger get the better of her. Astrid hadn't been mindful of her surroundings, and Fishlegs had succumbed to his nerves before checking which head he splashed his water on. If not for the weak toss and the fact that the dragon was holding its head up high, his shrimp of a cousin might have actually won that dragon match.

And then the moment when Hiccup suddenly tamed the dragon finally arrived in all its mystified glory. Leaning forward, the four teens watched, hoping to learn how Hiccup had done it. At first, it just looked like he was forcing the dragon to retreat with his bare hands. Their faces on the shield mirrored the ones they wore at the moment, until the zippleback was completely through the gates to its cage.

"Now think about what you've done." And he threw in the eel from that morning. Oh. So all dragons hated eels, not just Toothless. That was actually pretty cool, using a dragon's nature against them. Of course, this little tidbit went right over the heads of the twins, but Fishlegs and Snotlout, again, noted the fact and tucked it away for future reference.

I hope you're enjoying your reading! This is now my most popular story to date, hands down. I may have to start giving you guys two chapters a day instead of just one, but I just started work as a freelance writer so I may not have time to up the update schedule. But I will try will all I've got not to let this go on hiatus.

Bearybeary- Thank you for understanding. I won't be doing any other films, because this story is actually much bigger than just a simple film viewing story. And, none of the other films have quite the potential for this sort of thing.

Guardianofdragonlore- Glad you're enjoying it. I'm actually using real-life models for those two characters, so I like that it's working.

I've been looking over my chapters, and I've kind of put Hiccup on a pedestal. Is he turning into a Mary Sue?

14. All of Berk

Then cheerful music filled the hall, along with the sounds of thudding feet. Astrid looked around to see the entire Mead Hall full of Vikings, each scurrying towards either her and Stoic or the other teens, who she noticed were also watching Hiccup put together what looked like a leather saddle on a large Roman shield. The benches around her creaked as more and more Vikings took a seat and started to watch alongside her. The other teens were also joined by the adults of the village, until it looked like everyone was there, watching as Hiccup chased down Toothless with his new saddle held high above his head.

Spitelout laughed on the bench by his son as Hiccup pulled too hard on the controlling rope and sent them both tumbling. He was one of many chuckling at the blunder. But Snotlout noticed something about the tone in that laugh. It wasn't the usual "Hiccup's mistake is going to cost us later, but let's all laugh anyway" chuckling. It was the sort of laugh he remembered from when he was littler, and tried to lift a blade high above his head and ended up falling over backwards. He liked it much better, and let himself join in.

Gobber nodded in approval when he saw the hook his apprentice added to the saddle, and the harness that went along with it. There was some decent problem solving at work here, not to mention great leather-working skills. He also noticed the handles the boy had added to the leather saddle. Extra security was always a good thing, particularly at the experimental stage of the game. He couldn't remember how many times he'd injured himself trying to make the interchangeable port for his arm. Hiccup was being much smarter about the whole thing than he had been.

Astrid laughed at the look on his face when he took another tumble, this time because the foot controlled rope didn't have anything between fully open and completely collapsed. He blundered through the tall grass that covered some parts of Berk, only to find Toothless acting like a crazy cat that found its favorite herb. Wait a second. If Toothless hated eels because all dragons hated eels, then did Toothless like the grass because all dragons did?

Hiccup thought so, obviously. Her eyebrows shot up. Now it all made sense! This was how Hiccup had beaten the dragons, he'd been learning about them through Toothless and using their natural weaknesses on the dragons in the ring. That was incredibly clever! Although, she should have expected it from him. This was Hiccup, after all.

The realization of what had just gone through her head hit Astrid like a warhammer. She'd spent nearly her entire life ignoring perhaps the smartest person in the village. Then, when his cleverness had finally earned him some regard in the village, her reaction was jealousy. She wished Thor would open up the ground and swallow her.

Astrid's mother grinned at Hiccup from her seat a few Vikings down from Gobber. Hiccup was turning a gigantic fiery beast into a pussycat with nothing more than scratches. Just look at the way it arched into his touch. He switched from the top of the head to a spot down by the neck—

And the dragon collapsed in ecstasy! Hiccup eyed his hands in speculation, for a moment, before a grin started blossoming on his face. What was that Loki's boy planning now?

The big blond teen laughed out loud at the look on Astrid's face when the dragon in front of her just fell over for no apparent reason when, in fact, all it had taken to knock the thing out was a scratch on its sweet spot. This was genius! Hiccup should have been teaching the lessons! Although, in most battles you didn't get close enough to a dragon for most of these things to work. But why had the Nadder stopped just before it attacked Hiccup?

Well, he wasn't carrying any threatening weapons, like Astrid's ax or the twins' spears. He didn't even have a shield. Toothless had warmed up to the skinny teen as soon as he'd thrown that dagger away, so maybe it was another thing common to all dragons. Fishlegs wondered if that applied to Gronkles too. Maybe one of these days, he could get close enough to try it out.

Gobber 's grin widened at the sight of everyone running to Hiccup's table as soon as the youth sat down. The chief looked over at this old friend and Gobber returned the look, as if saying that, yes your son was very popular. Stoic's furrowed brows relaxed slightly with the confirmation and he turned back to the wall where Hiccup was, again, treating Toothless like the gigantic kitten the dragon so closely resembled, when he wasn't too busy being deadly. It seemed that Hiccup loved playing with his friend and was constantly thinking up things his dragon buddy would enjoy. Come to think of it, that was probably where half of his harebrained inventions came from, a wish to make his father happy. If only he'd noticed and praised his son's efforts, he wouldn't have had to run to a dragon for the recognition he should have received from his father.

Tuffnut watched with something akin to awe as Hiccup took down that pint-sized, scaly ball of pain with nothing more than a shiny shield. "Wow. He's better than you ever were." Tuffnut couldn't agree with his image self more.

Fishlegs despaired when he saw Astrid, once again, throwing around her ax to try and beat down Hiccup's rising star. It was obvious he was using something besides weapons training or brute strength to conquer the dragons, so why did she think she could achieve the same success with conventional means? Well, at least she had the sense to try and follow him when he ran past with a huge bundle wrapped in his arms. Something that strange had to be noticed, even by someone as mentally stunted as Astrid. But then, of course, she lost him.

The smith finally got a decent look at his apprentice's creation, and couldn't help but be surprised. The foot pedal system alone was amazing, never mind the suspension he was using to keep the controlling lines tight enough. Oh, how he wanted to get that kid back in the forge to teach Gobber how he came up with these ideas, and how to plan out and make them! This was five times more complex than even the most difficult of his interchangeable hands. What other ideas was his genius apprentice hiding in that little head of his?

Eyes wide, Snotlout watched Hiccup's first halfway successful attempt at flight. He wondered, for a moment, why he'd tied him and his dragon down to earth with a rope when they could be soaring through

the skies. Then, as the cheat sheet came into view, he realized that Hiccup was trying to make sure he knew the best ways to work the tail with the two foot pedals he'd designed, so that when he and Toothless did take their first actual flight, they wouldn't have as bad of disasters as they had the first couple of times they tried to take to the air. It just reminded Snotlout of how smart his cousin actually was.

Then the rope snapped and both were sent tumbling. A round of laughter from the gathered Vikings filled the hall as the odd duo got up, or at least attempted too. There were several flinches as the helmet-loving people spotted the damaged saddle. That wasn't going to be easy to fix without tools. How was Hiccup going to get himself out of this one?

By sneaking into the village trailing a dragon, as it turned out. One of the guards walked by and someone shouted, "I remember that!" Then he trailed the dragon through the now empty street. Stoic shot the man who'd spoken a look. Watchmen were supposed to catch this kind of thing!

"Hiccup, are you in there?" The whole village held their breath. How was the boy going to get out of a confrontation with Astrid when he and his dragon were joined at the hip, literally? The answer was simple. He wasn't. They laughed at his attempts to act casual, and roared their delight when he was pulled back through the door of the forge, and still managed to escape the blonde warrior. That boy was either insanely clever, or he had the devil's luck. And the village was leaning more and more towards the first one, along with the trainees, Gobber, and Stoic.

I had such great fun writing this chapter! It's the longest one yet for this story, so enjoy it.

**Thanks for clearing up the issue of Mary-Sueness, especially . I'll take him down a few pegs once I get out of writing strictly canon.
**

Thank you for all the lovely reviews! Since this has such a positive response, and since we're getting closer and closer to twist time, I'm changing the rules. I will post another chapter today, if I get ten reviews on this one and others.

15. First Flight

"I trust you found the nest at least?"

"Not even close." Almost all of the adult Vikings in the Hall flinched. That was an understatement. Two ships completely sunk, the last one almost beyond repair, it was a miracle they hadn't lost more than half a dozen warriors. In the three major battles they'd had with the dragons this time around, they'd not captured or killed a single one. The beasts were hard enough to fight on dry land with the help of torches, but in fog, on the sea, with only a ship's length for mobility? They'd been sitting ducks for an enemy that could disappear in moments. It was little wonder the raids were so unpopular that Stoic had to threaten them with babysitting his son to get volunteers. In fact, now, even that trick wouldn't work.

"Well, if by success you mean that your parenting troubles are over with, then, yes." Oh, that was ironic now. With Hiccup on the run with dragons, Stoic really didn't have any parenting troubles. He was hardly a parent to start with.

"He's gone?" A few of the Vikings who doubled as parents were taken back by the statement. Did Stoic believe so little in his son that, when everyone praised him, he just assumed Hiccup was either dead or gone? What, there was no chance the boy might have actually turned out well? With a father like that, it was a miracle the boy had any spunk left.

"Who would have thought it, eh? He has the way with the beasts." _We had no idea to what extent, _thought the smith as he watched his apprentice soar out onto the water with his Night Fury friend. His chest swelled with pride as he watched the two soar together.

"Position three, no four." Stoic watched as his son tilted the foot pedal and the tail snapped out behind him. The dragon took off and Stoic caught a glimpse of his son's exhilarated expression. This was more than boyish curiosity or innocence, as it had been when they'd bonded for the first time. There was something fierce, somethingâ€¦|

Brave.

"It's go time, it's go time." Working together, dragon and human glided between the two pillars, a perfect maneuver. The crowd of Vikings cheered around Stoic, but it quickly changed to laughter as the two hit another sea stack.

"That was my fault."

SLAP!

"Yeah, yeah, I'm on it." Laughter rang through the hall even louder, at both Hiccup's and Toothless' antics. It was like watching two best friends trying out something new and arguing about it. _Perhaps that's exactly what it is, _thought the redheaded man.

"Yeah! Go baby!" The Hall filled with whoops and shouts of "Yes!" and "Go Hiccup!" as the two flew higher and higher, exalting in their freedom, the result of weeks of planning, testing, and adjusting. A few Vikings even stood on the benches or waved their hands in the air, fist pumping and shouting even louder.

Then the hall went deathly silent as Hiccup came unhooked. As they began to freefall, Stoic had to remind himself that he had seen Hiccup alive when they'd come home, that this had already happened, that his son had obviously survived this. Because in that moment, he was more afraid for his son than he'd been for anyone since the night Valka had been taken by the dragons. But this was worse, because there was nothing he could do. His son had already gone through this without himâ€¦|

And had survived. Stoic felt his heart swell in his chest at the thought. His son had gone through an experience like this and come out stronger. The crowd breathed out a sigh of relief when they saw him hook back into the saddle. The Night Fury shot out its wings to

burn off some of the speed gained from the dive, shooting down barely above the treetops. What an incredible sight.

But they only had a moment before everyone tensed again when the maze of smokestacks came into view. How was Hiccup going to navigate that, that death trap if he couldn't read the cheat sheet?

Then, to Stoic's surprise, he stopped trying to read the stupid thing and actually threw it away. Hunched over the back of his dragon, Hiccup navigated the tailfin on instinct, leaning with Toothless as he made the hairpin turns. The whooping and hollering of his fellow Vikings kicked in again as the two friends celebrated their victory with a cheer and fireball. But, at that moment, their chief was silent. He had just realized something.

Out of all the Vikings on Berk, his son was the bravest of them all.

Yes, you can congratulate yourselves. You bullied me into posting another chapter. Though, in all honesty, I was really hoping you would. Although, this is my limit for now. You all will have another opportunity tomorrow. Feel free to post reviews, but the next chapter will have to wait.

**Thank you for the boundless encouragement! **

16. Everything We Know

When Hiccup popped up in the image again, Astrid laughed at his stunned expression. So, Toothless HAD flown through the fireball with Hiccup on his back. The way the edges of his hair were scorched told her as much.

But you know, she kind of liked it that way. You could actually see his eyes, instead of getting only the bottom half with bangs obscuring the top. And with no hair to obscure the shape of his face, the strong jaw was clearly visible, as was the small scar above his chin but underneath his mouth. Astrid wondered how he'd gotten it. A burn from the forge, perhaps? But how would he have burned his face? Even Hiccup's clumsiness had limits.

"Ah, no thanks. I'm good." Tuffnut sniggered. Like Hiccup was going to do that again, especially if he had a perfectly good roasted fish to eat instead. Then the flock of Terrible Terrors flew in and the twins grinned, ready to watch a dragon fight or at least something more interesting than two people just eating.

Several people grumbled. Those dragons might not be dangerous by themselves, but they were a right pain when you were trying to store enough food for winter, and especially bad when whole flocks of them turned up to devour their hard-won food stores. But Fishlegs leaned forward, eager to see how other dragons dealt with the little lizards.

He chuckled at the little tug of war Toothless had with one of them, and was surprised that the bigger dragon joined him in his sniggering. Wow, dragons had a sense of humor, just like they had loyalty and sarcasm. Okay, now he really wanted to talk with Hiccup. If only he was still here.

Stoic watched with a smile as the Night Fury used the other dragon's flammable gas against itself. "Hah! No so fireproof on the inside, are you?" Gobber turned to look at him, mouth hanging open.

"What?"

"That's what Hiccup said," the startled smith replied. _Talk about being similar. _

They watched as the little dragon curled up next to the boy, purring as he received a back rub.

"Everything we know about you guys is wrong." And most of the people in that Hall couldn't help but agree. When it was shown so blatantly, how could they not see the truth that Hiccup had tried to tell them before he'd been forced to leave? Why hadn't they listened?

What had they done?

**I know it's short. But I tried adding it to the previous chapter and it just didn't fit right. I'll make it up to you, thought. Ten reviews, and I'll post another one! **

We're almost finished with act one of this story! Soon we can say goodbye to canon and start the good stuff!

Again, thank you for giving so so much encouragement that I can't keep my hands off this story.

17. Awkward!

Snotlout's widened eyes returned to their usual position when he saw Hiccup lazily flicking around his charcoal stick. The flight had been amazing to watch, and made him itch to have a dragon of his own. Because, clearly, Hiccup had been right and their ideas about dragons were seriously outdated. Actually, the short, stocky teen doubted much of it had ever been correct, particularly the "kill on sight" warnings. Oh, Fishlegs was going to love the fact that his dragon statistics were all but useless.

"Dad! You're back! Uh, uh, Gobber's not here, soâ€¦" Said burly blond winced at the teen's efforts to hide his drawings and plans. The thing was, before Toothless, when Hiccup was working on different inventions, he tried to show his father and Gobber his designs. While the smith had adjusted them or pointed out a mistake where he found them, Stoic had pushed his son aside. How ironic. The first time Stoic actually noticed something his son was doing, Hiccup didn't dare try to share it with him.

Wait. What would he have done if Hiccup tried to share his dragon secret with his master? Would he have responded the same way the village had, with fear and anger? Or, knowing the boy much better than pretty much anyone else, would he have given the lad a chance to explain and elaborate. Gobber hoped it was the second one, but Hiccup had obviously thought he would react like everyone else. His apprentice would have told him if he'd felt that there had been the smallest chance of the big man understanding. He wished it were not so.

"You've been keeping secrets." Ooooooh, his cousin was so busted; try as he might to feign innocence. In fact, Snotlout was surprised Hiccup was still standing, not restrained or knocked unconscious. The encounters between father and son had made it clear there was no tenderness lost between the two, at least on Stoic's side. It made the teen grateful for his own relationship with his father, an easy camaraderie built on their similarities and shared love of strength.

"Oh gods. Dad, I'm so sorry, I was going to tell you, I just didn't know how to, ahâ€¦" Gobber winced so hard his eyes squeezed shut. He had the biggest bonehead on the island for a friend. How could Stoic not see the turmoil in his son? The tremble in his voice, his knees giving out, it was all there. Why could his idiot of a best friend not see it!? How in Midgard did someone like Stoic have someone like Hiccup for a son?

And you know, that thought about the two of them wasn't new. Everyone constantly wondered how their great, strong chief could produce a fishbone like Hiccup. But now the context was completely flipped. Now Hiccup was the one people pitied, because the cleverest boy on Berk had a lunkhead for a father, and one who never listened to boot.

"I almost gave up on you." Almost all the Viking parents in the room turned and glowered at their chief. You did not tell your son that, no matter how much he might deserve it. Stoic cowed under their gaze, knowing that their anger was justified. He had screwed up bigger than Hiccup ever had.

The silence, awkward on the screen, was filled with disbelief and anger in the hall. Many of the Vikings got up from where they were sitting at Stoic's table and moved to where the other teens were sitting. Clan bonds were what held their society together. When you boiled down those bonds to their base elements, love and caring were most of what was left. No one wanted to be close to a man who had shown nothing of the sort for his own son.

In fact, they were about to give up hope for their chief when he pulled out the hat. "I brought you something, to keep you safe in the ring." Stony faces discovered softness again and Hiccup lost his stricken look and inspected the gift. Even if it was just to keep him safe, the sentiment was caring. But many of them still glared at Stoic.

"Your mother would have wanted you to have it. It's half of her breastplate." Many of the kids made sounds of disgust or laughed. The adults sighed as their faces softened further. None of the younger generation had known Valka, taken as she was a mere fifteen years ago.

But the adults remembered her, and the strong love that had blossomed between her and Stoic. The days when their singing rang though the Hall had been some of the happiest Berk had ever seen, despite the dragon raids back then. So, for Stoic to give Hiccup one of the last pieces he had of his lost wife was a sign of great love, even if the young teen couldn't fully appreciate it.

Their chief's heart was in the right place, he was just a complete and utter dunderhead who didn't understand his son. Then again, so were the rest of them. And Stoic hadn't been alone in his fury when

he saw Hiccup on that Night Fury. They were all guilty of that, at least. No, Hiccup's fate was everyone's fault. And they felt the loss of such an incredible youth keenly.

****I decided to stop beating up on Stoic. Hiccup isn't the only character that deserves a deeper look, and I'll go more into his character once we get out of canon, which will be after the next chapter.****

****Lola- I would love to have this translated! You Go Girl!****

****Speaking of next chapters, since you did so well with my last challenge, I'm upping the ante. 25 more reviews, and I'll post another chapter. And no signing out and posting as a guest, tempting as that may be.****

****As of this moment, A Twist in the Story has 155 favorites, 207 followers, 24,442 views, and five chapters still waiting to be posted. Thank You ALL!****

18. End of Act I

The Gronkle flew past the viewers, bringing forth the memory of that day. This was the day the elder had chosen who would get the honor of slaying the Monstrous Nightmare. Stoic's heart lifted slightly as he saw Hiccup wearing the helmet, until he remembered what his son had said as he'd thrown it to the ground. Still, at least he had worn it the one time, before it all went sour. Val would have liked to see that.

"Stay outta my way. I'm winning this thing."

Snotlout smirked. "Like he wanted to win it in the first place." The others around him laughed, teens and adults alike. That was one thing Hiccup had always managed to do, make people laugh. In fact, the stocky teen kind of missed it.

Astrid flinched as her petty jealousy spilled out of her thoughts and onto her face and into her words. "This time for sure." Ouch. She needed to work on being a better loser, like Hiccup. Why was Hiccup such a good loser, such a good sport?

It couldn't be that he was just used to it. Fishlegs won almost as rarely as the skinny inventor during the Thaw Fest Games and other similar events, and wasn't able to bounce back nearly as fast. So what made him so resilient to his own failures?

Well, he didn't have a front to keep up, like her. Without her ax blade, Astrid wasn't good for much as far as feminine duties went. Her cooking was abysmal, her sewing more gaps than stitches. Her only grace was in battle. So she rigidly adhered to the image of proud and skilled shield maiden, and took any failures like an affront to her honor.

Wait. That was it! Hiccup didn't have an image to maintain. He didn't have honor to preserve. He was just Hiccup. There was nothing false about him, so failures were a part of himself that he accepted, integrated into his person, and moved on from. That was something to

admire.

She was starting to realize that there was much in Hiccup that could be admired.

On the other hand, she was throwing a tantrum, whipping her ax around and spouting foul language. Feeling the stare of her mother on her back, Astrid once again wished the floor would open and swallow her. She did not want to face her mother and a bar of soap right now.

"Quiet down. The elder has decided." The entire Hall flinched at the cheers generated from the image. Okay, maybe they hadn't actually known what was going on at the time. But they knew now. So the pained expression on Hiccup's face and his awkward laugh when Fishlegs lifted him up made a lot more sense, and was sympathized with a great deal more.

"Yes. I can't wait. I am soâ€¦" The villagers finished the sentence for him. _Leaving. _And really, who could blame him?

I cannot believe what just happened. You actually made me post another chapter. Why did I never think of doing this before!? You should have seen me when I read all those hilarious comments! My coworker (I'm at work right now) thinks I am going to explode because I am giggling so much. Of course, she's also reading this story so she knows what you guys are going crazy about!

I need to write more chapters, so there'll be no more posts up today. But still feel free to review! I love you all!

Next chapter we finally get away from canon!

19. The Nest

"Leaving." Hiccup swung the bag of supplies over his shoulders and hooked his arms through the straps. "Toothless? You ready, bud?" The playful Night Fury bounded down towards him, giving him a head-butt and warbling excitedly in his ear. He laughed and pushed the big dragon away. He had to check their flight gear before they left. They didn't want to end up stranded somewhere because a strap broke.

He walked around his big friend, checking the control lines for both pedals, making sure the straps under Toothless' belly were tight, occasionally buffing a piece of metal harness with his sleeve. The black pussycat of a dragon nudged his friend again when Hiccup came up beside his face and gave him a look that asked, clearly, if he was alright.

Hiccup crooned into his dragon's ear. "I'm fine, bud. It's justâ€¦I wish I could haveâ€¦" The dragon nudged him again and Hiccup smiled at his friend's attempts to lighten his mood. "You're right. Let's go." And so the two friends flew, straight up into the gathering cloud cover. Toothless didn't give Hiccup time to look back.

The sun was just beginning to set, so the view was a marvelous one. Painted pink, red, and even gold, the tops of the clouds skidded underneath them, momentarily darkened by Toothless' long shadow. After a few moments of gliding, Hiccup stopped gripping the handles

and let his hands fly up into the air. The wind, chilly as it was, felt like a god's touch on his skin. He closed his eyes and reveled in the feeling of absolute freedom.

Toothless looked back at his rider. He'd been worried when Hiccup had arrived last night and told him they might be leaving the cove the next day. But now, content in the knowledge that flight had brought back the friend he loved like a brother, Toothless put his face to the wind again and let the last of the day's sunlight warm his scaly face.

They rode like that for a few more minutes, both enjoying the gradually fading sunlight, dipping into and out of the cloudbanks like a playful dolphin. Berk was out of sight below the clouds and too far away to be even a speck on the horizon, and so Hiccup let his worries about his father's reaction fade from his mind. Who wanted to remember a grounded, downtrodden life when all the sky was at your fingertips?

Then suddenly, he was thrown forward on his friend's back as Toothless abruptly switched from a glide to a dive. "Toothless, what's going on?" he shouts into his friend's ear as he hangs on for dear life. Couldn't Toothless have warned him before he decided to fly perpendicular to the ground?

He was about to complain to Toothless when the dragon moved his head slightly and Hiccup got a good look at his eyes. The pupils were slits. This was not good. Hiccup laid even lower and tried to look as small as possible. It was a good thing too, since other dragons began materializing out of the mist, practically within arm's reach. If even one of those scaly fliers caught wind of him, he would be Viking toast in seconds.

Desperately hoping Toothless knew what he was doing, Hiccup clung to his best friend's back as the two flew with the crowd of other dragons. When the giant volcano came into view and the Night Fury flew through a gap in the walls and entered the spacious cavern inside, the teen aboard him started to realize what this was.

He'd just ridden Toothless into the dragon's nest.

He whispered to himself, "What dad wouldn't give to find this." Toothless landed on a nearby ledge, resting his wings for a moment. Hiccup spent the time observing the other dragons, watching as they threw food into the cloud of steam below. His eyes drew together as he contemplated this. Why on earth were they doing this when it was probably hard enough to catch food just for themselves?

He was knocked out of his thoughts when a Gronkle whizzed by about two feet from where he and Toothless were hiding. It went into the area above the mist cloud and regurgitated a small fish, letting it drop. It scratched behind its ear, a bit like a dog, and started to fly away.

Then a monster rose out of the fog and devoured it.

Heart beat suddenly very fast, Hiccup whispered to Toothless, "We gotta get out of here, bud. Now." And just as the great beast lunged for the closest food source, a certain dragon and rider pair, they launched themselves off the ledge and retreated through the top of

the mountain, seeking safety with the plethora of dragons also trying to escape those massive jaws.

The odd pair shot out of the top like a cannonball. Toothless shook his head, dispelling the remainder of the Red Death's control, and looked back at his friend. Hiccup was visibly spooked, but had the grace to smile and let his friend know he wasn't hurt. Satisfied for the moment, Toothless turned his attention towards finding a safe place to land so he could further inspect his friend. Encountering the Red Death wasn't something you did every day.

They let down on one of the bigger sea stacks leading to the nest. Hiccup hopped off his friend and removed his friend's flying gear for the moment. Slowly, he sat down and picked up a twig. Dragging through the ground, he concentrated on what he'd just seen.

The dragons were being controlled by that thing in the nest. They had to find food for the beast and themselves. Dragons could usually find enough fish to feed themselves, Toothless was proof of that. So the only reason they raided the Vikings was to get extra food easily, to feed that gigantic dragon and keep themselves off the menu.

Suddenly, he stopped thinking so deeply and looked at what he'd drawn without realizing it. It was a picture of that thing's head. That beast was the force behind the war between the dragons and Berk. It had to be stopped, and the only way to do that was to kill it.

He sighed. So simple, and yet, so complicated. The needed end result, the death of that monstrosity, was easy to figure out. But to do that, he was going to need more than just him and Toothless. He was going to need other Vikings and other dragons. The only way to get both was to go back to Berk and try to make the rest of the village see sense.

This could either go perfectly, or horribly wrong. The village could remember that he'd been defeating dragons left and right, and recognize that he was worth listening to. Or, they could push him aside as Stoic's hiccup of a son who just wanted everyone's attention, like normal. No, he couldn't risk that happening, not with both the dragons and Berk at stake. He couldn't tell them.

He would have to show them.

And so, he cinched the saddle tight around Toothless again, fitted his feet into the pedals, and took off in the direction he'd left only hours before. If this worked, maybe he wouldn't have to leave for good after all.

****Yes! First chapter out of canon! Any questions?****

****Thank you for all my lovely reviews on last chapter! I find it interesting that so many people thought the way in which I told the story was the twist, when I had this waiting in the wings.****

****From this point on, I will not be able to show the Vikings' reactions to everything as I am not a Cressida Cowell but a humble amateur, but I will try to weave in some of it when we get to the third act in a few chapters.****

****The response for my last challenge was overwhelming, so I'm upping the ante again. If I can get thirty reviews, I'll post the next chapter. After that, we'll see. Good Luck!****

****Does anyone have fanart for this?****

20. Released

Hiccup landed back inside the cove, but only to hide his gear. If what he had planned was going to work, Toothless could only be carrying the saddle and flight rigging, not the extra supplies they'd need to run away. If they still needed to run away after this. And, knowing his dad, he probably would. Still, it was worth a shot.

Quietly, he and Toothless circled around the island and landed on the bridge leading to the arena. Dismounting slowly to avoid jangling the metal pieces of the rig and raising a racket, Hiccup raced for the arena and levered the doors open. Thank goodness they'd built in some sort of levers for these things. He would never have been able to open them on his own.

Once both doorways leading into the arena were open, Hiccup took a deep breath and headed to the cage containing the Terrible Terror. If Stoic and the other villagers accepted his ideas about dragons, he could easily find more dragons to train for them. But, if they didn't and still insisted on learning how to kill them, these wouldn't be around to witness their efforts. He pushed up the handle to the door of the Terror's cage and the little beast shot out of its cat flap.

Slowly, Hiccup knelt down and held out his hand to the small animal. Cautiously, it approached him and settled its snout underneath his palms. Breathing out a sigh of relief, Hiccup scratched the beast's scalp and moved the touch down below the neck, hitting the dragon's sweet spot. Once it was knocked out, he picked up the little lizard and walked out of the arena, releasing it beyond the walls.

One down, four to go.

Plastering himself against the arena wall, he reached out and yanked down the handle for the Gronkle's cage. The beast burst out without preamble, looking for shields to target. Seeing none, it landed like a ton of rocks hitting the floor and was about to fall asleep when it saw the small boy slowly walking towards it. The big scaly beast sniffed in the boy's direction and caught a very distinct whiff of dragon scales. Many of the Vikings it had smelled reeked of dragon blood, but this boy was the first to smell like scales. She flew forward to get a better sniff.

Hiccup took its approach as a good sign and reached out his hand again. The gronkle breathed in deeply through her nose, processing the smell further. Leather, that wonderful grass, and the faint smell of charcoal mixed with the dragon scent. As she sniffed, her snout accidentally brushed Hiccup's hand and her pupils widened until they filled nearly half of her eyes. The boy slowly began to walk to the right, turning the gronkle with him as she kept her snout under his gentle fingers. Then, suddenly, he removed the comfortable hand and gestured towards the open gate.

But she didn't immediately run for freedom, as Hiccup expected her too. Instead, she gave him a quizzical look, as if asking what to do. He gestured towards the gate again and she took off, giving him her idea of a smile as she went.

Two down, three to go.

He ran towards the Nadder's cage, pressing himself against the wall just as he had with the Gronkle. He levered open the door and the brilliant blue dragon stepped out into the open. She took one look around, spotted the open gate, and flew through it without a second thought. He relaxed from his tensed position. Not having to convince another beast that could take his head off was a relief. Still, he was a little disappointed that he didn't get a closer look. That dragon really was beautiful. He shrugged.

Three down, two to go.

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The zippleback was next, and it liked to hide in the gas the one head spewed. At least, that was how it had entered the arena the day they'd trained with it. So either he was going to have to wait for the gas to clear, or find that dragon inside the fog. He liked neither idea.

He opened the door and, sure enough, the gas preceded the dragon. Instead of staying pressed against the wall, Hiccup ran for the exit and made it out before the fog filled the whole area. This way, he could avoid attacks and still make sure the dragon got out. About thirty minutes later, the Zippleback emerged from the hatch and flew off, much like the Nadder. Only this, time, Hiccup wasn't at all upset to see it go. That thing was worse than the twins to deal with.

Four gone, one left. And this one was the monstrous Nightmare.

When the door opened tomorrow and the dragon was gone, everyone would know something was up. It would be the end of his secret and the beginning of either a great age of cooperation between dragons and Vikings, or the beginning of his exile from the place and people of his birth. He walked over to the crank that opened the door and started it moving.

But the Nightmare didn't come out.

Hesitant to approach the second greatest prize of all the dragons, Hiccup walked back into the arena and faced the dark archway that led to the Nightmare's enclosure. As he got closer, he saw that the Nightmare was just lying on the ground, looking bored. Perhapsâ€|

Hiccup placed his hand right above the dragon's sensitive snout scales. The beast made a move to push his nose into Hiccup's hand, but just as he did, the youth backed away, bringing the red firebreather with him. Slowly, Hiccup walked back out into the center of the arena, Nightmare following. He rested his hand on the dragon's snout and it purred like a regal cat. Contact made, the young dragon rider started backing up again, this time towards the open gate. The nightmare followed, eager to keep that slim hand on those very sensitive scales.

Once both boy and beast were outside the arena completely, Hiccup removed his hand and gestured towards the sky. The nightmare took off, silent as a shadow. Now all five dragons were free. And there was one empty cell, door still open, which needed to be filled.

Butting his friend from behind, Toothless rubbed the top of his head against Hiccup's back. He turned and hugged his scaly best friend. "Thanks bud. Now don't worry, I'll be back for you in the morning, and after I've let you out and we've shown them how amazing you are, we'll go and fish as long as you want." Then he led Toothless into the old Nightmare pen and, with a last caress along the dragon's sweet spot under the jaw, closed the door on him and went home so no one, especially Stoic, would know what he was planning.

Well, you guys tried hard enough to get another chapter, and some of you were wondering what I did with the arena dragons, so here you go. I know you all still wanted to see the character's reactions, but writing those, fitting in the new material, and showing everything went on in Hiccup's head was a bit too big of a challenge. I'm an amateur, not J.K. Rowling, people!

Even if the teens don't get to ride dragons in this fic, I still wanted to include that iconic scene where the Nightmare follows Hiccup out of its cage. What do you guys think?

Again, thank you for all the support. Instead of issuing a challenge, the first person to review this one gets a question answered.

21. Please, No

The next day, Hiccup walked down to the arena, fully dressed for flight, with the addition of the helmet his father had given him just two nights ago. The others tried to comment on what they thought was a strange type of armor, or tried to wish him luck, but he ignored them. Today was the day. Either they lived with him and Toothless, or without them. There would be no in-between after today.

The entire village cheered around the arena as Stoic gave his rousing speech about Hiccup's supposed transformation. _Transformation is right, _he thought with a little sadness. _I've never been one of them and just at the moment they are all so convinced I've finally measured up to their standards, I'm going to throw that conviction on the ground._ Gobber opened the two hatches into the arena and Hiccup walked through to stand in the center. He heard the gate slam shut behind him, a precaution to ensure the Nightmare stayed in with him, so he could kill it and so no one else would end up hurt if he failed. But that gate wouldn't be a problem for him and Toothless.

Slowly, the large tree trunk holding the doors to the Nightmare cage closed was cranked up, and Toothless burst out of the confined space. Cries of "Night Fury!" and "Get Down!" echoed around the arena as many of the Vikings surrounding the ring hit the deck or started to run, when a few of the braver ones leapt down into the ring to try and fight the beast off. Hiccup might be the best dragon fighter of his generation, but even he couldn't tackle a Night Fury, or so the

Vikings thought. Seeing the incoming crowd headed for Toothless with axes and other weapons, Hiccup leapt on top of his friend and clicked the pedals into place, snapping the tail open. The sight of Hiccup on top of the mightiest of dragons stopped almost everyone dead in their tracks.

Everyone, except Stoic.

"Son, what are you doing?" He flinched inside at the horror in his father's voice. This man would be the hardest to convince. But he had to try.

Summoning strength from the love of his friend and the knowledge that he had to do this, Hiccup locked eyes with Stoic and unleashed the truth. "I am protecting my best friend."

"Hiccup, that beast is a dragon! Vikings kill dragons!"

"Then I'm not a Viking!" Stoic took a step back at this. What?

But Hiccup wasn't through with him yet. He took off the helmet and threw it on the ground. "I'm a dragon rider! And if you're not willing to let me show you the truth about dragons, then I'll—" But he didn't get to finish, because Spitelout charged forward and tried to hit Toothless in the hope of damaging his wings.

Seeing the danger, Toothless unleashed a plasma blast at the chain roofing above them and the two shot out of the arena. Dodging the various projectile weapons that were thrown his way, the pair circled the arena as Hiccup tried to make himself heard over the yelling. "Please! Just let us land and I'll show you the truth! Dragons aren't dangerous!"

Then Stoic's voice cut through the sound. "Those dragons stole your mother! You are a disgrace to her and to me!"

"Dad, please—"

"Do not call me that! You are no son of mine!"

And that was it. The last bond he had to this island snapped. Berk could no longer be his home.

He had no home.

Still dodging the weapons thrown their way, Toothless and Hiccup flew far and fast, around the circumference of Berk and back to the cove where Hiccup had left his supplies. He quickly slung the basket over his shoulder, fastened the straps in place, and hopped back onto the back of his best and now only friend. With a whisper, "Go, bud," the two took off into the clear sky.

Toothless flew his friend to a small island, about halfway between the nest and Berk. Once he touched down, the dragon looked over his shoulder at the boy on his back. Warbling his concern, he drew the boy out of his momentary despair long enough to dismount and remove the pack from his shoulders. He opened up the basket and began taking things out, but stopped and just gripped the lip, shoulders shaking.

Toothless walked around beside him and nudged the boy with his nose. Hiccup turned and hugged his best friend around the neck, finally falling to his knees. Toothless extended his neck and bent his head so the entire underside of his jaw was rested on the boy's back. And in this way the dragon comforted him as he released the shock and grief of losing the only home he had ever known.

Once Hiccup had tired himself out until only dry sobs were left, Toothless nudged him to get his attention and nodded towards the edge of their little camping spot. The teen laughed. "Don't worry, bud. I didn't forget." He hopped on and the two spent the next few hours fishing, an activity that served the dual purpose of feeding both of them and distracting Hiccup from his grief. Toothless threw in as many air acrobatics as he dared, loving the sound of his friend whooping in delight.

The fish gave the pair renewed energy, but once they landed and the joys of flight no longer nudged the painful memories out of his mind, Hiccup again began to cry. But it was with less abandon than earlier in the day, when the pain had been fresher. So he wiped his eyes as he started the fire and cooked his share of the fish, occasionally sniffing as he set up the tent.

But Toothless had been apart from his friend all of last night, and didn't plan to do so again tonight. So when Hiccup headed for the tent, he jumped in front of the youth and spread his wings wide, making curling motions. So when the darkness came that night, Toothless wrapped him in the black massive wings that gave both of them freedom and let the boy rest in his warmth.

Hiccup slept soundly, cradled by his best friend. The puffy eyes faded from red back to pale pink during the night and when he woke, the sobs that had wracked his body mere hours ago were shoved aside in favor of his new goal.

He would find other dragons to train.

He would kill the Red Death.

And then, when peace was a true possibility, he would find a way to get through to the Vikings of Berk.

He would find a way to get through to his father.

But that would come later. _Dragons first, Vikings second. _He packed up the few items he'd removed yesterday in his attempts to be normal, strapped the pack back on, and leapt onto his best friend. They had dragons to find.

Dragons to train.

****Twenty-five reviews equals another chapter! ****

****Since everyone loved watching the Vikings' reactions so much, I'm thinking of doing a companion story to these few chapters where it's only new material for the movie. I don't want to include it in this fic, since that would break up the flow of the story, But I mugh tput it somewhere else. What do you guys think?****

****This story has over 30,000 views! Yes!****

22. Preparations

Over the next two days, Hiccup sailed around the islands closest to the nest, looking for trainable dragons. He was pleasantly surprised. Nadders and Gronkles flocked to him, bringing the occasional Nightmare and Zippleback with them. He thought the Nadders came mainly because he was an excellent groomer and the Gronkles just liked the scratches, something other dragons weren't very good at. So, he used these two things in their training.

Nadders were the vainest dragon alive. So, whenever they did something right, he showered them with compliments and found that, after such treatment, they rarely got it wrong. Gronkles received a well-placed scratch for jobs well done. Soon both species had an array of verbal commands they'd respond to, along with a variety of whistles.

As for the three Zipplebacks in his arsenal, he just tried to keep them from blowing stuff up. He was able to teach them a few simple commands, like "Gas" and "Go left", but he didn't think they'd be as responsive during a battle as they were during a training session. Two heads was concentration and attention span divided. Nope, he definitely couldn't count on the Zipplebacks.

The Nightmares weren't trainable, but they were predictable. Give them a challenge, put them in a fight, and they wouldn't give up until they came out on top. If he needed a distraction, Nightmares were the way to go. A pity he had five, including the one from the ring. That was a lot of firebreathing pride to keep track of.

Actually, all the bigger dragons from the ring had turned up for his training, even the Zippleback. They were among the best of his troops, and seemed to have it in their heads that they were his personal guard. Toothless had gotten into fights with the Nightmare a couple of times because of that. Thankfully, neither dragon was badly hurt. It seemed that fights for flock dominance were carried out with sheathed claws and retracted teeth, on the part of the Night Fury. An interesting thought to pursue once the Red Death was dead.

After the week of training was concluded, Hiccup found himself staring down the massive problem of which strategy to use. He'd learnt on the day he'd taken his first real flight with Toothless that dragons fueled their fire with gas they created inside their stomachs, and if you lighted it while it was still inside the dragon, you could cause massive damage. So the first plan was to enter the nest and somehow get the dragon angry enough that it would fill its whole body with gas. Then, Toothless or another of the trained dragons could ignite the explosive and the Red Death would blow up faster than a bucket in the twins' possession.

But there were a lot of ifs in that plan. What if the Red Death used another method of attack? Scauldrons used water, Thunderdrums used sound. There was no guarantee that the Red Death used gas. And, even if it used gas, what if the producer of it was only in the mouth? Then only the mouth would be affected by the explosion and, while that was a good thing, Hiccup didn't know what the beast would do if it was well and truly angered. This and a horde of other issues had

forced him to come up with a contingency plan.

A cage of molten rock.

The Red Death was already almost all the way entombed in that mountain. All they needed to do was reduce its mobility. Toothless could then knock boulders and stalactites off the ceiling and walls, and the Nadders, with the hottest known dragon fire, could melt them on the way down, producing lava that would harden around the big dragon. The gronkles could use their lava to cement the whole structure. After that the Red Death would starve or kill itself, depending on whether or not it flamed and cooked itself.

But this plan also had flaws. What if Toothless caused a cave-in when he shot at the surrounding area? What if the Red Death burst out of the shell of cooled lava? What if the lava just went down into the cave, through some unknown crevasse, and out into the ocean or onto the beach? What if the Red Death just ate the lava, instead of getting coated in it? And what if she roasted them all before they had a chance to make the plan work?!

Hiccup grabbed his head in frustration. No matter what he chose, he was going to put everyone at risk. He had to choose, and if they failed or won would land squarely on his shoulders, because he was the one who decided. Gods, he hated being the leader.

Was this how his father felt, when he had to make the big decisions for the tribe? Did he debate one solution over the other, trying to find an option where the benefits outweighed the risks?

And what part had he played in those balancing acts? He was always messing up everything with his inventions, well-meaning or not. Several plans and options had probably been discarded because, while they were the best option, throw a Hiccup into the mix and they suddenly became that much riskier, that much more dangerous. No wonder his father had always been angry with him.

In the end, Hiccup decided that the gas ignition plan had fewer unknowns than the lava plan, and risked fewer dragons. They only needed to make it angry, and only needed one dragon to make the fateful shot down the throat. Of course, that dragon would be him and Toothless. If he wouldn't risk himself, he wasn't going to ask any of the others to do it. Besides, Toothless had lots of practice.

The day before the battle, he crawled into his makeshift tent besides the patch of burned earth where Toothless slept and rubbed the furs in his face, inhaling deeply. If this worked, if the dragons were free to make nice with the Vikings, perhaps he had a prayer of righting the world and helping his people into the much larger world of dragons. And if it didn't work, well it wouldn't matter, because he would be dead. It was a miracle he managed to sleep at all.

You know that part where Hiccup debates which strategy to use? That was also me deciding which to use. If you want to see the lava method, check out **Becoming LÃ-fÃ¼rasir****. That's where I got the idea.**

I will write the companion story with the Viking reactions, but probably after this one is finished. No review challenge this time.

****Who liked the Stoic love I slipped into this chapter? ****

23. Battling

Oh, Misty eye of the mountains below,

Hiccup slid on the leather harness, tightening the laces in back to ensure it stayed on.

_ Keep careful watch of my brothers' souls, _

Wrapping the leather, he fitted the arm guards snugly to his forearms.

_ And should the sky be filled with fire and smoke,_

With a small thong, he tied back some of the longer strands of hair from his face.

_ Keep watching over Odin's sons._

Mounting up, he flew Toothless off their small refuge, with all his trained dragons in tow.

This time, they flew towards the nest in complete control of themselves. Hiccup had discovered that, unless the signal caught you off guard or you were looking for it, resisting the urge was very easy. Toothless had broken out of it the instant Hiccup was in danger the last time they'd visited the Red Death. Slowly, silently, they approached the nest and flew in through various cracks and flaws in the mountain's structure. Toothless, as planned, came out near the head of the giant beast, and landed in almost the exact same spot that he had on their first visit to the nest together. The gronkles entered much lower down, near the dragon's legs and tail. If worst came to worst, Hiccup could fall back on his lava plan and have the gronkles encase it's legs in molten rock, limiting its mobility and keeping it from flying.

The nadders were positioned above him, ready to agitate the beast into launching a fire attack. They also acted as backup in case Toothless failed to light the gas as the beast prepared to flame. But Hiccup didn't think Toothless would miss. Still, better to be over prepared, and he had the dragons to spare. After about thirty minutes of waiting, to give the dragons enough time to get in position, Hiccup whistled and the gronkles began their assault.

Over twenty dragons spewed molten rock at the Red Death's legs. She started stomping around, bellowing. But just as she was starting to turn her massive bulk to face this sudden annoyance, Hiccup whistled a very high pitch and five nadders hit the beast straight in its eyes. The roar that issued from the great beast nearly deafened Hiccup. But it was a small price to pay for blinding the creature.

Then it opened its other four eyes.

Not good.

Hiccup whistled again, hoping that the next line of nadders would take the hint and fire at the eyes again. They needed the beast blind! That way, when it made its first fire shot, it wouldn't be able to aim and the other dragons would be able to dodge. And they needed that first fire blaze to earn the time lag between when the beast created the gas and when it ignited. Hiccup was fairly sure that's how the dragon's fire worked.

He'd whistled for the nadders, but it was the Nightmares that answered. Two of those scaly showoffs spewed their burning saliva directly into the creature's eyelids. Now, no matter what it did, that burning liquid would filter through and devastate the monster's eyesight. Now why hadn't he thought of that? Probably because he didn't think the Nightmares did anything but show off. Guess he learned something every day.

Now blinded and in considerable pain, the beast whacked its gargantuan head against the sides of the mountain. Then, a telltale his filled the air. It was gassing up. All the dragons retreated into the holes and crevices they'd used to enter the mountain as the giant let loose a jet of flames that barreled up through the top of the mountain and into the sky above. Hiccup measured the lag between the sound and the flames. The gap was big enough.

This would work.

Now Toothless and he were ready to finish the fight. The beast was blind and grounded, thanks to the gronkle lava hardening around her legs. She was also angry, which made her quick to flame. Perfect. Hiccup whistled a series of short high notes and one long low one. That was the signal for all the other dragons to retreat.

The roars of the Red Death were accompanied by the fluttering of dozens of wings as Hiccup's dragons and all of the wild ones still in the mountain flew for their lives. Once the sound faded, Hiccup leaned down and put his hand beside Toothless's eye. "This is it, bud." Toothless fired a plasma blast at their colossal enemy and flew into the tunnel above it.

At first the Red Death just tried to bite them out of the air, but with her eyesight gone, she really didn't have the best aim. After five minutes of dodging and aggravating her with blasts to the face, Hiccup finally heard that distinct whistling sound from before. In that moment, Toothless switched from the glide above her head to a rapid ascent. Diving down only minutes later, Toothless unleashed a plasma blast, the last in his arsenal, down the Red Death's gullet. The instant they saw the gas in her giant maw ignite, the dive quickly turned and the pair shot through one of the tunnels leading out of the mountain. They had won.

But there was one thing Hiccup didn't account for. Such a massive explosion wouldn't just funnel out of the mountain through the tunnels and cracks, like he'd hoped. Instead, the pressure reached a volcanic level, and the whole mountain exploded.

Rock shards, Dragon remains, and bits of Red Death flew everywhere. Toothless dodged most of it, and Hiccup thought they'd escaped the worst of the blast when pain shot up from his left leg. He screamed, but kept his focus in front of him so he could guide Toothless to safety. A few more bits of dodged debris, and Toothless landed on the

first spot that was big enough and at a safe distance from the explosion. Hiccup unhooked himself from the saddle looked down to unhook his left leg from the stirrup.

A long, jagged stone shard, wider than his three middle fingers, had penetrated his leg about halfway between the knee and foot.

And it stuck out five inches on the other side.

His eyes rolled back in his head and Hiccup fainted, still seated on Toothless.

****If you want the full experience for this chapter, turn on I See Fire from Hobbit. I really imagined this whole scene with that song as the backdrop music because the song fits so well. ****

****25 reviews equals another chapter today!****

****Sorry for the lousy action scene, but I like strategy more than actual fighting.****

24. Wounded

Toothless feels his rider go limp, and cries out to his friend. He looks back and sees the leg. Not good. Roaring frantically, the Night Fury tries to get another dragon's attention. A few nadders, a gronkle, and a whole flock of Terrible Terrors answers. The blue nadder from the ring takes one look at Hiccup's prone form, the distressed expression on the black dragon's face, and immediately knows something is wrong with the one who saved her.

As gently as possible, she takes the boy's arms in her talons and lifts him out of the saddle, which he had thankfully unhooked himself from before falling unconscious. Laying him on the ground, the dragons crowd around him. They sit like that for the rest of the day and most of the night, keeping vigil, hoping that the boy will wake and tell them how to help.

Hiccup is jolted awake the next morning by the sheer pain in his leg. One of the dragons has accidentally nudged the rock shard imbedded in the limb and it had been enough to make the boy see spots. Toothless' head shot up at the sound of Hiccup's yell. He growled to the other dragons. Hiccup was awake!

Hiccup steadied himself against the ground with his hands. Then Toothless was with him, head butting him, licking him. He would have enjoyed it and joined in the play, if not for the fact that he had a massive and potentially fatal wound to deal with. Taking a deep breath, he looked down at the limb again.

Reaching out a hand, he just touched the tip of the rock shard. The resulting jolt of pain arched his back and almost made him scream. But he didn't. He didn't want to frighten Toothless and the other dragons huddled around him. But the pain had told him something. Something that scared him.

The pain was only in the top half of his leg. The nerves had been cut.

He was going to lose that leg if he didn't amputate the portion below the shard.

He looked at the many dragons huddled around him, inspecting their mouths. But their teeth were all so jagged. None of them would be able to make a clean cut with those jaws. So the best he could hope for was a quick bite. But that would need a dragon with a strong jaw. Which dragon had the strongest bite?

Then he remembered something Fishlegs had said when Gobber introduced the dragons. "Jaw strength, eight." He looked over at the Gronkle closest to him.

He muttered to himself, "Gods, this is going to hurt," before beckoning to the Gronkle. "Hey girl. I need you to take my leg and bite down hard, right here." He drew a line with his finger just above the last piece of shrapnel, a few inches below his knee. Then he turned to Toothless, staring at him worriedly. "Once she does that, can you blast it?" Toothless crooned a yes in his rider's ear and moved down until he was nose to knee with his friend.

The gronkle opened her powerful jaws and lay down in front of Hiccup. Slowly, as gently as he could, he placed his limb inside the dragon's mouth so that the shard rested against the inside of her teeth. Thank Thor gronkles had such big mouths. He reached out and, finding a flat, smooth stone underneath his fingers, placed it between his teeth and bit down. Then he nodded to the dragon holding his leg in her mouth. She bit down.

The whole world echoed with screams.

The Gronkle pulled away as quickly as she could and Toothless let out a small plasma blast, searing the wound closed and stopping the blood flow. He looked up at his friend who had somehow maintained consciousness despite the pain. He tried to pull himself in the direction of the small pond the island sported, and once the dragons caught on, a nadder, a different one than before, gently took hold of his arms and lifted his body off the ground. Toothless shoved his head under the lifted torso and the birdlike dragon pulled him on the rest of the way.

They carried Hiccup over to the pond but noticed that he'd passed out on Toothless' back. The pain must have finally gotten to him. Still, they needed to get him off their fellow dragon's back. It was lucky coincidence that they set him down halfway in the pond, submerging the new stump in the cool water.

When Hiccup regained consciousness an hour or two later, it was the cold that drove his eyes open. It looked like the dragons had submerged his stump in water. Good. That was the beginning of the treatment for burns like this. Blame the first aid know how on years of blacksmithing. But now that the wound was cool and mercifully numb, he had to complete the second step of the treatment. He hoped the bandaging wouldn't hurt him further because, as much as he knew about burn treatment, there was next to nothing he remembered about amputation.

Stripping off his riding vest and arm wraps, he pulled his shirt over his head. He tried to tear the shirt into strips, but found that the residual pain, combined with the blood loss from the wound, rendered

him too weak. Fortunately, Toothless figured out what he wanted and shredded the garment with his claws. Hiccup smiled at his friend and placed the bandages in the cool water.

Once the wound was numbed again, Hiccup pulled himself out of the pond and tried to sit up. Again, his strength failed him. But Toothless didn't. Just as the youth was about to let himself fall back down, the black dragon lay down behind him, providing Hiccup with a warm, dry, and very concerned back rest. Giving his friend a grateful smile, Hiccup grabbed the first of the strips and wrapped it around the new stump.

The numbing lasted just long enough for Hiccup to fully bandage the wound, using the last of the strips to tie the remainder of his left pant leg over the top of the bandages. Hopefully, that would keep it from getting too cold. Because it was getting cold, as the dark blanketed the sky, and the pain was sure to send him into oblivion again.

He shivered and tried to get back onto Toothless so they could return to where they'd left their gear and some rudimentary medical supplies, but his scaly friend wouldn't hear of it. Instead, he rolled over onto his back so that Hiccup was lying flat on top of him, stomach touching stomach. Hiccup managed a laugh. "Oh, so this is how you're gonna be, huh bud?" Toothless let out a dragon chuckle.

Knowing his point had been made, Toothless rolled into a more comfortable position on his side. Hiccup curled up until he was snugly situated under the dragon's right foreleg. Toothless curled his right wing over the boy, and gently rolled him onto it using his foreleg. This way, Hiccup wouldn't be lying on the cold, hard ground, but the warmth of dragonskin.

It was these measures that let Hiccup sleep through the pain, although his dreams still filled with battles gone wrong. But even as he turned and muttered in his sleep, his companion kept him warm and safe.

****You rose to the challenge! YES! You guys have no idea how much I wanted to post this chapter. The amount of medical research I had to do on this stuff was enormous, but feel free to correct me. In fact, feel free to say anything! Due to some very candid criticism, this chapter has been edited to make the process more painful for Hiccup (I'm terrible, I know) and more realistic by extension. What do you think?***

****This story just crossed the three hundred reviews threshold. I never thought I would get here in a million years! Thank you all!***

****Some of you thought the battle in the last chapter was too easy, but think about it. Hiccup had much better trained forces who actually listened, a trapped enemy, and a plan he could take his time coming up with. From my standpoint, that's a lot more advantages than he had the first time around.*****

When Hiccup woke up the next day, two things demanded his immediate attention, the dull throb from what was left of his left leg and the strange black canopy over him. Well, since he couldn't do anything about the pain right that second, he decided to investigate the black tent stretched over him. He poked the materialâ€¦

And Toothless withdrew his wing, along with a snort. Hiccup laughed. _So it was Toothless' wing. _He reached over and scratched the dragon between his eyes. "Thanks bud." Toothless warbled a greeting and pressed his face against Hiccup's palm, glad that the skinny youth was alright. The moment was interrupted by a Terrible Terror landing a few feet away with something in its jaws. It crawled over to the pair and dropped the object on Hiccup's lap.

It was a bunch of sticks.

Hiccup looked at them and looked at his stump. And his inventor brain kicked into high gear.

But before he could really get down to the business of building himself a new leg, there were things that had to be taken care of. Arms around Toothless' neck for support and balance, Hiccup walked over to the small pond and gingerly removed the bandages around the stump.

It still looked awful, but it could have been much worse. The bandages were filthy with dead skin fragments, black as charcoal. He swirled them around in the water and shook them to remove the bits of dead tissue and much of the water. Setting all but one aside, he lowered himself into the water and began massaging his leg.

Moving his hand in small circles, he gently removed more of the burnt tissue until he could see the red underneath. Once most of it was removed, he pulled his now numb leg out of the water and tied the bandages around it again. He sat up and eyed Toothless.

If he was going to build himself a new leg, he'd need to get back to their original campsite where he had a few tools and materials. It wouldn't be much, but it was a lot better than what he had to work with at the moment. Besides, he also had fish, and Toothless really needed a good meal. The problem was getting there.

The tail fin was operated by two foot pedals. He now only had one foot.

Instead of getting bogged down, Hiccup tried to come up with solutions. What else could he use? His hands, maybe?

He got up on his right leg and Toothless plodded over, letting the boy pull himself up onto the dragon's back. Slowly, the teen worked his hand into the pedals and heard the telltale snap of the fin as he tilted the one on the left side. This could work. He just needed to hook himself in, and that meant getting the harness back on.

Again using Toothless as a crutch, Hiccup limped over to the area where they'd left his gear. Five minutes later, he was back in his leather and was flying Toothless like he'd been using his hands since the beginning.

After safely arriving back at their campsite, Hiccup slid off of

Toothless and crawled over to the tent where he'd left his supplies. A few moments later, he began throwing fish out of the tent flaps, which Toothless pounced one without a second thought. He really was hungry. Hiccup did the same, but with some dried meat strips, as he looked over what he had to work with.

The wood from the Terror formed a good beginning, and he had some of his smaller blacksmithing and leatherworking tools with him. The leather thongs he'd bound around his arms for the battle could easily be sliced smaller into ties, and the awl he used for the leather could bore holes in the wood just as easily with a little added pressure. The only thing he was missing was something he could attach the leg to and that would also be comfortable for his new stump.

He returned to the basket and dug deep through the various objects, feeling around for something he might be able to use. Finally, he drew his arm back with a carved wooden cup clutched in his fingers. It wasn't a barrel mug, but had been carved from a single piece of wood, so the inside was smooth. He brought it to his stump, and thanked Odin he was so skinny. The cup was perfect.

Once he had all the pieces, it was the work of a single afternoon to put his new leg together. Using his awl, a sharp whittling knife, and a rock for extra leverage, Hiccup up two holes in the wide side handle of the cup. Two strips of leather went through these holes and through the corresponding holes on the longest piece of wood, which took the place of the leg part. Another hole was bored in the end and tied to a sort of plank Hiccup had devised by weaving several of the shorter, smaller sticks together with leather cords. Two strands of this weaving went through the hole on the end of the leg part and tied it on.

Of course, Hiccup had to keep the foot part at a right degree angle to the leg part, so he tied two of the strongest sticks slantwise across the joint, each forming a triangle on its side of the wooden leg. It didn't have any mobility, and would be useless for flying, but he was able to get around well enough on it.

Or he would be, once the stump healed enough that it didn't bleed every time he tried to put weight on it. Right now, he spent most of his time in his tent, or using his hands to fly Toothless and fish for the two of them. The other dragons showed up often, and he kept training the more responsive ones. They learned to come, go, fire, and even smile on command. The training helped the days to pass and to keep his mind off the wound.

About four weeks after the battle with the Red Death, and six since his disownment, he was finally able to walk on his prosthetic without pain forcing him back down. It was a good thing, too. He had to find a way to share everything he'd learned with the Vikings on Berk, and he had to get through to them this time. Now that the Red Death was gone, any dragons that showed up at his old home would most likely be friendly and trainable. The situation was too good not to take advantage of. So Hiccup laid on Toothless' back, put his hands in the pedals, and flew off in search of a solution to the Viking Stubbornness Problem.

The walls went dark and the talking stopped. Stoic sat back on the bench aghast. It was like he'd been inside his son's head, privy to every thought and feeling. Even the pain during the amputation had

felt real. He whispered to himself in the complete silence in the Mead Hall, "Why did he do all that?"

"To help you and the dragons." Stoic turned in his seat and saw Hiccup standing in the middle of the Mead Hall, one arm over the Night Fury Toothless.

**And so two of the most common questions I've received have been answered. Yes, Hiccup was there watching them the whole time, and yes, chapters 19-24 played just like a film, but a little different, because they heard all the character's thoughts. Thanks to all my wonderful reviewers, particularly Alpha B. A. 7 for her great summaries and Niendil for helping to improve last chapter with some constructive criticism. No challenge this time since I won't have internet access for most of the day. **

26. He's Back!

But before Stoic could say anything, Hiccup turned around and walked away. He was about to exit the Mead Hall when a slim, cloaked figure blocked his path. A distinctly feminine voice issued from the hood. "This isn't what we agreed on, Hiccup Haddock."

He sighed. "Yeah. So what's your price for the memory projection?"

The figure was about to answer when a much rougher voice filled the Hall. "Memory what? What are you talking about?"

Hiccup turned and faced his once-father. "Well, Elena sort of cast a spell on the Mead Hall so you would all see my memories of how I met Toothless and what happened after that. But it's okay. I'm the only one who has to pay her for the illusion." He turned back to the figure. "What do you want?"

She smiled and threw back the hood, revealing short hair and fun filled grey eyes. "First, I want a proper introduction."

He mock bowed, which only made her laugh. "Of course, Milady." He turned to the Vikings, who hadn't moved from their spots on the benches. "This is Elena Equiano, Enchantress of the northern mountains, specializing in illusions and memory projections, which was what she just did." He looked over his shoulder. "Did I miss anything?" She shook her head, still smiling at him. "So, what's the price?"

She grinned. "You have to give your village another chance."

Hiccup stumbled back a few steps. "What?"

"You heard me. You must spend one week here and at the end of that time decide whether or not you want to stay. During that week you cannot be alone with only dragons. You must either be completely by yourself or with another person. If you are with Toothless, you must also be with a human." She spread her hands. "That is the price."

"And here I thought she just wanted a ride on Toothless," he muttered under his breath.

The occupants of Berk, on the other hand, were overjoyed with the news. They were not going to let Hiccup get away a second time, or was it third time? No, they hadn't known about the first time, so that didn't count.

Just as they were about to race forward, the enchantress spoke again. "I will return in one week for your answer, Hiccup Haddock. And take care. The answer you give me will bind you for the rest of your days." She whirled her cloak dramatically around her and vanished as the folds of fabric fluttered to the ground.

Hiccup laughed and picked up the cloak. "Well, that wasn't dramatic at all."

He was about to tuck the cape into his jacket when two massive arms engulfed him. Stoic tightened his grip. "Son, I-"

And then suddenly his arms were empty and Toothless was setting Hiccup down next to him, still wrapped in his tail. "Thanks, bud. I think I was about to get my ribs busted." The occupants of the Mead Hall laughed. It was good to have their sarcastic young friend back. In fact, they were so happy that they ran towards the two best friends.

Hiccup and Toothless took one look at the oncoming stampede of Vikings, exchanged a glance, and ran out the entrance to the Mead Hall. Remembering Elena's rule about dragons, Hiccup shouted, "You go that way!" and pointed to the right. Toothless started running in the indicated direction, and Hiccup headed to the left, straight into the woods. Hopefully he could hide out there for a while until the rush of burly men, women, and children had abated somewhat.

He ran through the woods, dodging trees and trying not to get his wooden prosthetic caught on any roots or rocks. When he could no longer hear the sounds of Viking pursuit, he sat down on a nearby boulder and thought.

Should he head to the cove and hide out there for a few days? Nope, that wouldn't work. They all knew where it was and how much he loved the place, thanks to his memories. Nope, the village was the last place they'd look for him, probably, so he got up off his rock and started walking in that direction. When he reached the village, he saw that it was practically deserted. Most of the Vikings had gone to look for him in the woods he'd just vacated, and a good thing too, because more than half of those Vikings wanted to either hug him until his ribs broke or pound him with questions about dragons. So, while all of Berk looked for him in the woods, he strolled through the village towards the forge. He figured that no one would look for him in the most likely place.

Hiccup headed for the little room Gobber had reserved for him in the back. It had been the birthplace of most of his inventions, including the bola launcher and Toothless' prosthetic. Now, he needed the paper scraps littering the untouched worktable for a different reason.

He had his own leg to design.

Slowly, he eased into the small chair and untied the straps holding the wooden replacement onto his stump. Placing on the desk in front

of him, Hiccup studied the design and cringed. Okay, maybe he hadn't had much to work with on the island, but he should still have come up with a better design. This one was entirely too reliant on leather straps that could snap at any time. What he needed was metal parts that fit together like hinges. Mobility was also a problem. How did he maintain the tension needed to allow for a healthy stride instead of his current stiff one? With these problems in mind, Hiccup hunted down his charcoal stick and hunched over a large scrap of paper.

That was how Gobber found him, and it was a good thing, too.

There was no one better in all of Berk to help the young amputee find a leg that worked for him.

****Nothing really happened in this chapter, but I needed it for transition and explanation. Last chapter was my favorite, though. I had so much fun coming up with different ways for Hiccup to reappear. I'm glad you liked my biggest twist. There's not many more after this.****

****No review challenge since there's only five or six chapters left and I don't want this to end!****

27. In the Forge

"Looks like a decent start." Hiccup jumped at the comment and tried to whirl around to face the burly smith. But it didn't quite work, since he'd taken off his wooden leg. So instead, of facing his former master, he ended up sprawled halfway between the desk and the floor. Gobber laughed. "Why don't we get out some of the molds and you can try pouring that design there?" He pointed at a picture of one of the more intricate parts.

Hiccup hauled himself back on to the chair. "Sure, just give me a minute." He strapped his leg back on as Gobber watched.

Just as he was about to secure the last tie, the smith grabbed his wrist. "You don't want to do that. It'll cut off the blood flow if you tie it like that." So Gobber took the strip of leather in his good hand and wound it around a little looser. Tucking in the end, he motioned for Hiccup to stand. He did, gingerly putting weight on his left leg. "Better?"

"Yeah." He looked at the bigger man with a mixture of curiosity and surprise. "How did you know?"

He reached down and tapped his own prosthetic. "Don't lose a limb without learning a few things. Now come on. And bring that design with you."

Hiccup grabbed his drawing and followed the big man. He was a bit nervous. How was he supposed to act around the villagers now, especially those he'd been even remotely close to before? What if they all expected him to be some sort of super Viking? Granted, he had killed the Red Death, but Toothless had done most of the work. He was no stronger than when he'd left.

Taking a deep breath, Hiccup followed his old master. After close to

seven years working in the forge, Gobber probably knew him the best out of everyone, so life would be normal with him after a while. Probably.

Hopefully.

Gobber handed him two molds and told him to get started before reaching out and pumping the bellows, heating the fire to an even hotter temperature. Thank Thor it hadn't gone out while he'd been in the Mead Hall, watchingâ€¦well, everything. He glanced over at the brunette calmly measuring the length of his right shin and comparing it to what was left of his left leg, making a notation on his sketch. How was he supposed to treat the boy now? He couldn't just start casually ribbing him like he used to, there was nothing to tease him about that wasn't sensitive or just plain wrong. Should he wait for Hiccup to start the conversation or-

"Hey Gobber, what do you think of this?" He looked over and saw Hiccup holding up a drawing for him.

The confusion intensified for a moment. Why was Hiccup, builder of the prosthetic tail fin, asking him? "Why're you asking me?"

"Well, you know more about this sort of thing, legs, I mean."

Gobber realized what the boy was insinuating and quickly balked at the thought. "But your leg needs to be special, Hiccup. You've got that saddle to work, after all."

"You're right!" Hiccup examined his rough sketch again. "I'll have to redesign the whole flight rig! The pedal needs to be able to fit a smaller foot, andâ€¦wait, I don't have an ankle joint anymore. How am I going to change positions?" He looked down at his leg, this time with an expression Gobber knew too well from the days just after his own losses. "How am I going to do anything?" He looked up at Gobber and then back at himself, eyes turning very bright. "I can't do anything." He ran back into the little room that was just his, and the big smith had the grace not to follow.

Hiccup had been so busy treating his wounds, flying Toothless, creating a suitable replacement limb, finding Elena, and getting back to Berk that he hadn't had time for his thoughts to drift in the direction of his loss. But when he started thinking about how he was going to have to redesign his whole flying rig, those thoughts flooded in thick and fast. How was he going to train the villagers to ride dragons when he couldn't get his own off the ground? Berk might have a few amputees, but none of them were dragon riders! How was he going to help his village when he was missing a piece of himself?

Gobber kept pumping the forge, keeping it hot for the melting of the steel and stopping occasionally to listen. When he finally heard something, he left the bellows and squeezed through the door into Hiccup's space.

The boy was hunched over on his desk, with his wooden prosthetic in front of him. Gobber couldn't see below the desk top, but he could bet the boy's hands were wrapped around his stump. His shoulders were also shaking.

The big man came up behind the slim youth and wrapped the boy in his arms. "It's alright. I won't say it'll be easy, and I won't say things will be like they were. But it will get better. You're already miles ahead of where I was. Heck, I'm still stuck with a wooden peg, and you're about to make yourself a metal one!"

"But it won't be the same," Hiccup choked out.

"No, it won't. But knowing you, it might even be better than the flesh one."

"No, it won't be! That leg didn't bleed the first time I tried to stand! That leg didn't almost drown me when I went fishing with Toothless! That leg didn't-"

Gobber cut him off with a hug. "We can make it do those things. A few months down the road and the skin will be tough enough to jump on. We can make it lighter, use hollowed pieces instead of solid steel. That way it'll still be strong enough."

"But it won't be the same."

"No, it won't." And, because it was Gobber, Hiccup didn't feel any less because he cried himself silly.

I don't know how to say this kindly, so I'll just say it. I didn't give you a challenge last chapter, and because of that I got less than ten reviews. What happened to the people who loved to encourage me and help me write? To those of yoyuw ho did, thank you.

20 reviews equals another chapter.

I did go through a time when I couldn't walk well due to foot surgeries, so I actually have a very good idea about how Hiccup might feel about all this.

Don't worry. Stoic gets his spotlight moment next chapter, and then everyone else. I'm still working out the kinks for the last two, but we're getting very close to the end, people.

28. At Home

When Stoic finally finished combing the woods for his son, he trekked back to the village. He was about to walk back to his house when he heard hammering coming from the direction of the forge. Maybe Gobber would have some ideas about where to look for the lad. As he drew closer to the building, he heard snatches of conversation. "If I use this kind of steel, it'll be lighter, butâ€¦"

"Nah, don't use that. It'll snap like a twig. Why do you think we don't use it for cages?"

"Well we won't need those anymore," Hiccup answered, a bounce in his voice. He sounded happy. Good.

The chief interrupted the back and forth between the two. "Hiccup, have you thought about where you're staying tonight?" He didn't know if Hiccup would want to go back to being his son. He has disowned the lad, after all.

He answered, keeping his eyes on the mold in front of him and away from the window where Stoic stood. "Well I didn't think I'd be staying, so I don't really know. I think I'll just-"

"Go with your father." Gobber walked up to the teen and slapped him on the back. "He's got more than enough room."

Then the teen did look at his father, and Stoic's heart almost broke at the uncertainty written on his own son's features. So he did his best to eradicate it. "Of course he can stay with me. I left his room exactly how it was so it'd be ready for him when he came back." And the smile that threatened to split his son's face gave him enormous comfort.

Stoic hung around the forge until the new dragon rider decided to quit for the night. The instant he walked out of the forge, Toothless was on him, licking and nudging him. Irritated, the teen shrank away from his friend's wet tongue. "Toothless, you know that doesn't wash out!"

He started to run his hands through his hair, trying to get most of the gunk out before it had a chance to harden, when his father placed a massive hand on his shoulders. "Come on. Let's get you home so you can get cleaned up. You look like you need a bath." They started to walk towards the house.

As they strode up the hill to the biggest house on Berk, Stoic noticed something about his son's walk. He was limping slightly. The burly man looked down at his son's feet and noticed that one of the straps holding together the foot had come loose. "Wait a minute, son." The big man picked Hiccup up and placed him on Toothless' back.

Hiccup raised an eyebrow. "Dad, I'm fine, I just—" then he noticed the loose strap. "Oh. Thanks, Dad." He rode Toothless the rest of the way home.

Once they got to the building, Stoic opened the door and motioned for the pair to go through. The dragon didn't wait and waltzed right in. Spotting the cold hearth, he shot a plasma blast at the half burnt wood and the sound of crackling filled the room. Stoic smiled his thanks to the beast and helped his son off the Night Fury. Then he hesitantly reached out towards his son. Hiccup waved him away and limped toward the kitchen himself. He was not going to let this slow him down. He was not going to let this make him weak. He was so focused on proving his strength that he didn't notice the crestfallen look on his father's face.

The kitchen was a rather special room in their house. Because most of the household's washing was done in there, they had running water in that room. Water from one of the streams on Berk was channeled underneath the floorboards to form a small pool that gradually drained out. It was right handy for washing dishes, but served just as well for bodies if you didn't mind the cold. So Hiccup grabbed the soap from one of the shelves and set about cleaning himself.

His hair was easy, just suds and a dunk, but he took greater care with his stump. The skin was new and still healing. He didn't need a raw stump giving him more trouble on top of his breaking prosthetic.

Once he was sure the cold water didn't aggravate the skin, he washed up the rest of his body, scrubbing extra hard at the spots Toothless liked to lick. Oh gods, did it feel good to be clean again!

He stepped out of the pool under the floor and was about to head for his room to get some clothes when he saw the green tunic and brown leggings on the floor near him. How'd those get there? Toothless didn't bring them, he couldn't have opened the drawers he kept his tunics in. He dressed quickly, put the floorboard back in place, and walked out into the living room where his dad was sitting tending the fire. His dad had gotten his clothes so he wouldn't have to climb the stairs with his bum leg. Hiccup didn't know whether to be offended or pleased by the gesture. He decided on pleased. "Thanks, Dad."

Stoic beamed at his son. "It's the least I could do. Now get upstairs. You've a big day tomorrow."

So, still limping a little, Hiccup headed up to his room. Trying not to slip on the stairs, Hiccup kept his eyes on his feet until he reached the upper landing. He looked upâ€¦

And stared. He had expected his father to search the place for signs of his treachery, and any indications of further plots. Heck, he had even wondered if his father had just cleared everything out to make room for someone else, Snotlout perhaps. But he hadn't. He'd left it just as Hiccup liked it, with drawings hung up all over the walls and neater than most Vikings would have kept it.

Perhaps this place could learn.

But he could decide that later. Right now, his dad was right. He needed sleep. So he snuggled under the covers and settled in under the furs. He was asleep in seconds.

****There's your Stoic moment, people. And yes, Viking houses actually do have floors like that. I did my research.****

****These two were never good at talking to each other, so I figured I'd let actions speak louder than words.****

29. Everywhere Else

Fishlegs chopped the last block of wood for his mom and headed over to the Mead Hall. He needed to get the Dragon Manual, but not for reading this time. He needed to take it to Hiccup and talk about updating the information, maybe adding training tips and such. He pushed the huge doors open and looked over in the direction of the cubby where the book was kept, only to find Snotlout, of all people reading it.

Snotlout was reading a book. Ragnarok was coming.

Hiccup's cousin looked up from the pages he was perusing for a moment and noticed Fishlegs. A grin broke out on his face. "Ha ha! Just the man I wanted to see." He raced over and grabbed a still stunned Fishlegs by the arm. "You're gonna help me pick out a dragon."

Fishlegs blinked. "What?"

The other teen rolled his eyes. "Well, Hiccup's got a Night Fury, So I have to find a dragon just as good to ride." He pulled on the bigger teen's arm again. "So let's look through that stupid book and pick one out." Fishlegs gave up the struggle and let Snotlout sit him down near the book. He opened the covers gingerly, flipped to the page with the different dragon classifications, and asked Snotlout which one he'd like to look at first.

About an hour later, the twins popped up. Or, more like they snuck in, afraid someone would see them. Slowly, they edged towards where Fishlegs and Snotlout were sitting and sat down next to the two. Tuffnut leaned in conspiratorially and whispered to Fishlegs, "You got any explosive dragons in there?" Fishlegs nodded and flipped to the Zippleback page. Looked like everyone wanted a dragon.

When Hiccup arrived at the forge the next morning, prosthetic straps tightened and in their proper places, Gobber approached him with a few ideas of his own for the saddle rigging. The teen jumped at the chance to look at the new designs, and was inside the forge before Toothless could blink. But before the scaly puppy could follow his best friend, Gobber shut the door and explained, "We're going to be working on some delicate stuff, Toothless. Why don't you try having fun somewhere else today?"

The dragon wandered off and Gobber sighed in relief. He wanted Hiccup to get used to being around people again, and that wasn't going to happen if he constantly had a dragon hanging off him. Besides, he wanted to ask his young friend some questions and didn't know if Toothless would react.

Then Hiccup piped up behind him. "Hey Gobber, half of these are too big for Toothless. And I don't need a big frame like this." He held up a sketch that was basically a chair on top of a dragon.

Gobber scratched behind his head nervously. "Heh heh. Well, that one's actually for me."

"For you?" Hiccup gave the sketch a closer look and switched his gaze back to the burly blond. "What do you mean?"

"Well, if I'm going to have a dragon I need a way to stay on it."

"Then let's stop speculating and get this leg made. We have a dragon to find." Hiccup smiled. Training Gobber for a dragon was going to be fun.

When Toothless wandered off, he ended up going to the cove where he and Hiccup used to play. It was one of the only safe places he knew, with some great spots for sunning and all the fish he could dream of, if he managed to catch them. And since Hiccup hadn't been able to truly fly since the battle with the Red Death, he'd had to learn a little more about fishing on his own.

But when he got to the cove, someone was already there.

Stoic was sitting by the pond, staring into the water, mumbling to himself. As Toothless got closer, he could make out some of the words. "So this is where it all started, huh? I didn't know a place

like this even existed on Berk. It's beautiful." The dragon crooned in agreement behind him, making the big man jump a little. "Oh, it's you Toothless." He reached up and patted the scaly beast's head, smiling gently.

But then his face grew serious. He knelt down so he and Toothless were eye to eye. "I need to thank you, for saving my son. If you hadn't encouraged him, taught him, I don't thinkâ€¦ Well, he certainly wouldn't be who he is. So thank you, Toothless." He was about to give the dragon a solemn pat on the head when Toothless leapt on top of him and began giving him a thorough spit washing. Now he knew exactly how his son maintained his humility. You couldn't have a huge ego when your friend could knock you down and coat you in spit in three seconds flat.

Astrid was also in the woods, still trying to come to terms with what she'd seen in that projection. It wasn't that Hiccup was more skilled than she'd given him credit for. It wasn't even what he'd done with the dragons and the Red Death. Of course, those things were hard to swallow, but they weren't the thing that had her aimlessly wandering.

"You look lost." She whipped around and threw her axe in the direction of the speaker, nearly pinning a very disgruntled enchantress. "No that's not a very nice greeting," she purred, brushing herself off.

"What are you doing here?" the shield maiden growled out.

She shrugged. "I'm here to make sure Mr. Haddock fulfills his part of our deal. It would be tempting to just run off and leave the lot of you before the week was up. Is that what has your mind running in circles?"

"N-no, that's not it at all!" Astrid stammered out.

"Oh?" Elena replied smoothly. "Then what is it?"

"It's just thatâ€¦ when we were watching thatâ€¦ whatever you did, he seemed happier with the dragons. Why would he come back here? I mean, him doing all that for the dragons, that makes sense, but why try to help Berk too?"

She laughed, a light chuckle. "You forget that he wanted to help from the beginning. All those inventions, all those misguided efforts, even his befriending of the dragons, can all be traced back to his wish to help. In fact, that's what he was doing when his father threw him off the island. Hiccup has only ever wanted to help. He's extraordinary that way."

Astrid didn't answer, and Elena left her to her thoughts. And there were many of those, all revolving around a single spindly-legged person with a lopsided smile.

****And so some of the things from the movie come to fruition. All the teens are dying to get dragons, Astrid is still confused (give her a few more chapters) and Stoic is learning to live with Toothless. Not very exciting.****

****Love all the follows, reviews, and favorites!****

30. What He Saw

The next few days seemed strange to Hiccup. Where regular blacksmithing was concerned, he and Gobber acted as they always had, if with a little less insulting and a little more dragon talk. But after hours, when they were working on his new foot and redesigned rig, the big smith seemed to defer to him more often, asking him what he thought of this type of metal combination for a specific part or wanting Hiccup to look over the casting mold for a saddle bit before he poured in the heated metal. He brushed it off. After all, this was his foot and equipment they were working on. But his father was not so easily ignored.

The man treated him like he was made of glass! Sure, he had a hard time going up stairs, but that was no reason for Stoic to move his bed to the first floor. A small stumble and suddenly the big man was lifting him up and brushing him off. Just that morning he'd had a slight limp and Stoic had physically lifted him and carried him over to the forge, and then had the audacity to tell Gobber not to let him stand for too long! The frustration built up in his arm until the hammering echoed through the forge and alerted Gobber.

Hiccup was holding the hammer above his head, preparing another angry strike when suddenly the weight was gone and he was sent tumbling backwards, thrown off balance by the sudden lack of weight. The big smith caught his back and helped the teen stand upright again. "Thanks Gobber."

Gobber nodded, but then one side of his unibrow arched up. "Now, why can't you say that to your father when he tries to help?"

Hiccup started hammering again. "Because" clang! "he thinks I'm" clang! "too weak" clang! "to handle myself!" He picked up the hot metal with the tongs and plunged it into the cooling bucket, a hiss sounding through the momentary silence.

It was official. When it came to expressing the softer side of emotions, his friend was more useless than a hiccup. Well, he'd just have to help his meathead of a friend out. "I know he's overreacting, but it just shows he cares." Hiccup brought the part he'd been working on out of the water and set it to the side, pausing in his work. Gobber took that as a sign to plow ahead. "You should have seen his face when you had that gronkle bite off your leg. He was-"

"I did see it." The smith gaped at the interruption. "I was there. I saw everything."

Gobber squashed down the embarrassment at the thought that Hiccup had seen him dancing on the table when the lad shot the Red Death smack in the jaws and continued coaxing his young friend towards a better understanding of his father. "Now do you think he would've cried like that if he hadn't cared about you?" Again, Hiccup stilled, remembering the different emotions that had run rampant across his father's face while he was watching the different scenes.

The awed but proud smile that stretched his lips when Hiccup led the Nightmare out of its cage and let it go free. The hands that threatened to splinter the tabletop in their grip when the Red Death

made a dive for him the first time he'd seen it. The understanding and sympathetic grimace that scrunched his brows together when Hiccup debated about which strategy to use.

The tears that wetted his beard when the screams from the amputation echoed around the Mead Hall.

Then he remembered something more.

Stoic's face hadn't been the only wet one when he'd lost his leg. Half the Vikings in the Hall had salt tracks trailing down their faces before the scene was through. It had been a chorus of voices that yelled "Get in there you stupid nadders!" and "There's no way you're gonna get Hiccup, you blasted behemoth!" during his battle with the Red Death.

Snotlout, his tormentor of a cousin, had glared at his father after the memory of his disownment had played on the walls.

Astrid had screamed "No!" when he blacked out on Toothless' back after seeing the damage done to his leg.

Hiccup turned from the anvil and stared at the back of his mentor, the man who had shouted, "I taught him that!" when he started crafting his wooden leg. That face had gone through so many different emotions during the projection; some Hiccup didn't even know the smith was capable of. He was the meathead with attitude and interchangeable hands. He did not cry like a baby when his teenaged apprentice basically told him he was going to get his leg chopped off. Or did he?

Gobber knew exactly what the amputation process was like. Thor, he'd gone through it twice. He lived with only two limbs intact. Hiccup looked from his master to his own hands. His hands were the second best part of him, after his brain. What would it be like to lose one of his hands? It didn't bear thinking about.

But the truth was, there was more to this village than he'd seen. There was passion in the hearts of the Vikings here. It often manifested as stubbornness, but it wasn't stubbornness that made them cry, laugh, and cheer for him. But that passion also acted as a shield, guarding their softer sides. Hiccup would never have known Astrid practiced because she felt inadequate if he hadn't seen the look of loathing she'd given herself during the part where he beat her for the honor of killing the Nightmare.

Even Snotlout was capable of greater emotion than just pride, and the twins could laugh at what Hiccup found funny as well as destruction, like they had when Toothless hit him with an ear flap on their first real flight. They might have underestimated him, but he'd returned the favor in full.

His father—well, it would take a long time to fully understand the big man, if he ever got there. But despite what it might look like, his father did care about him. He deserved another shot. They all did, really.

_Funny, I thought deciding whether to leave or stay would be a lot harder. _And the youth went back to his hammering.

****After writing this chapter, I'm not sure I actually need that companion story. What do you guys think?****

****I put a poll on my profile to determine whether or not I should still do the companion story after this chapter. If you don't know what I'm talking about PM me or read previous ANs. But go and vote, people!****

31. Romantic Flight

The next morning, Hiccup woke up to the sound of Toothless hammering on the roof. He hadn't been able to fly Toothless for the last five mornings, because of Elena's rules. But Toothless was not going to stand for that this morning, which meant he had to find someone to go flying with them.

It couldn't be any of the adults, they were all too heavy, and, new opinions regardless, he was not going to ask Snotlout or the twins. That left Astrid.

He ventured out under the predawn sky to look for the ferocious blonde. After asking a bleary-eyed Mr. Hofferson if she was home and being told no over the sound of Mrs. Hofferson giggling out of view, he headed for the woods where Astrid liked to practice. All he had to do was listen for battle cries and he knew which direction to head in.

True to her nature, Astrid almost took his head off with an ax throw when he made his presence known. "Hey Astrid," -dodge oncoming projectile- "Do you want to go flying?"

Her throwing arm halted in midair. "What?"

He put down his hands from in front of his face. "Well, since I can't go anywhere alone with Toothless, I need someone with me to take him flying. Most of the villagers are too heavy and I don't want to think of what the twins or Snotlout would do in the air."

She nodded that was not a pretty picture. "Well, I guess I can go. Just don't do anything crazy, okay?"

"Sure," he lied. Oh, he was going to give her the ride of her life.

Before Astrid could even retrieve her ax, Hiccup was pulling her by the hand over to where Toothless was waiting. When Hiccup started buckling on the flight gear, Toothless was hard pressed to keep still amidst his excitement. They were finally going flying! When Hiccup mounted up, the dragon would have leapt into the sky if not for the gentle hand just behind one of his plates. "Astrid's coming with us today, bud. So let her get on and we'll go."

Slowly, the blonde walked towards the black beast and Hiccup gave her a hand up. He threw a caution over his shoulder. "You better hold on tight, Toothless likes to go a little crazy." He nodded to his friend and the dragon leapt into the air.

He could almost hear his ribs cracking under Astrid's vicelike grip around his torso. "Calm down, Astrid."

"You said you wouldn't do anything crazy!"

He laughed into the wind. "This is how he always takes off! He hasn't even started yet." Her grip tightened.

Toothless leveled off for a moment and then flipped over his entire body and freefell. Hiccup gripped the black body below him with his legs, with the speed of the fall helping to keep him in place. Astrid had no such luck. Wind and fear were working together to pry her loose. Her hands were almost torn apart when Toothless halted the fall just above the water, turning and leveling off mere feet above the surface.

The non-panicky teen scratched his friend behind the frill. "Very, nice bud. Let's get back in the air for some more." _So we can really freak out Astrid, _he thought, a mischievous grin playing at the corners of his mouth. It was funny to see the shield maiden battling something entirely new. But she was in his world now. Then Toothless started spinning and more than just her arms were digging into him. She'd somehow wrapped her legs around him too! The pair went into another steep dive, headed for the ocean yet again.

Then Hiccup saw a glimmer of sunlight in the grey predawn sky and gave his friend a pleading look. Crazy time was over. Now they were really going to impress her.

Evening out into a steady glide one more time, Toothless began a more gentle ascent than the previous ones, and the lack of hair-raising movement let Astrid relax enough to open her eyes. And then they widened.

The trio was right under the cloud bank. Astrid loosed one arm from around his waist and reached up to touch the mass above her, but drew back at the last second. "Go on," the brunette urged. "Touch it."

She raised her hand again and let the cloud engulf it. It didn't feel cottony, fluffy, or like anything she'd dreamed of as a child. It was cold, wet, and slightly uncomfortable. But still, she was touching a cloud! Slightly giddy at the thought, she threw both hands in the air and let the cloud above coat them in a film of moisture.

Seeing her delight, Toothless decided to take them through the cloud to the top layer of the sky. With a gentle change in direction, Toothless piloted the pair above the grey and into a sky with a few stars still bravely peeking out, waiting to greet the sun as it rose. The blonde gasped. The moon looked enormous up here! She wondered what it looked like a night.

Then all thoughts of darkness vanished as the sun began to rise, coloring the clouds below them pink and red and gold. Toothless leveled off so they were coasting just above the multicolored masterpiece of the sun's making. Hiccup spared a glance back at Astrid's awed expression, then leaned down and crooned in his friend's ear, "You did good, bud." The dragon leaned into his touch before facing the front again.

Once the mingled beauty of stars overhead and color below had been enjoyed to its fullest extent, Toothless let out a warble and

gestured towards the cloud bank with his snout. His friend understood, and gave him another nudge just below the frill to let him know. Slowly, the trio dived below the clouds and Astrid was introduced to one of the greatest joys of the future of Berk.

Sunrises from dragonback.

They flew in from the west, so the whole island of Berk was lit up from behind with the colors playing out on the water and making it sparkle more brilliantly than anything Trader Johann had to offer. The deep shadows created by the buildings of the village created a breathtaking contrast with the bright colors and glittering water. As they flew closer to the island, the sun was blocked from view by the rocky mountains behind the village. Now Astrid could see everyone waking up, looking around, and beginning to go about their days.

The pair and their passenger landed near Hiccup's house, the same place they'd taken off from. Hiccup leapt off his friend and extended an arm to help the girl off. "Thanks for coming with us. Toothless and I needed that." And with that, both dragon and boy went about their business, not aware of the starry-eyed look they left behind on the fearsome Viking's face.

****And there's the Hiccstrid chapter everyone's been waiting for. And if you thought Hiccup was being nasty in the beginning, don't worry. I meant for that, since the first time he had to make her like them and this time he doesn't. How did I do? Did it translate well into a sunrise?****

****Next chapter will be the last before I start the companion chapters. ****

32. The End of the Beginning

The next day, Gobber came into the house before Hiccup was even halfway out of bed. No matter what that kid decided, he was going to need the new gear he and Hiccup had been working on. There was also the fact that Gobber couldn't stand seeing such great machinery go to waste. The leg alone was revolutionary, with two different feet, one for flying and one for grounded activities. And the way Hiccup designed the switching mechanism was much cleaner than his own, with one always ready to take the place of the other.

And, of course, the flying attachment matched perfectly with the new saddle. It even had the option of locking the tailfin, in case of emergencies. Toothless had hated that part of the new rig at first, but Hiccup had made him see the sense of the mechanism, after getting over his starry-eyed look. Oh well, even to a hardened Viking like Gobber, the bond those two had was at least a little awe inspiring. Now if only he could get a dragon partner like that.

"Hey, Gobber." The teen called out to his teacher from the stairs. "Did you bring the gear?"

"Of course." He laid it out on the table still devoid of breakfast. "I hope you'll let me see how it works out for you and that devil over there."

Toothless growled at the name, but the big smith's smile was enough to convince him not to blast the man. Well, that and a stern glance from Hiccup. A stare which he then turned on said smith. "You're not finding out what I've decided before anyone else. Now," he picked up the leg, "Let's see if this thing works."

A few minutes and fumbles later, the trio walked into the center of the town square where the beginnings of a crowd greeted them cheerily. Suddenly, Fishlegs came running up to him and took refuge behind his back. "Hiccup, you have to help me."

"Okay, this is confusing," the smaller teen muttered under his breath before turning to his cowering companion. "Okay, what is it?"

The "it" chose that moment to appear in the form of Snotlout and the twins, all three shouting about dragons and still needing to pick them. Spotted, Fishlegs tries to evade them by hiding behind Hiccup again, not a very good tactic since he's at least three times as wide as the other boy. Noticing the absurdity of his actions, the blond teen runs with the other three giving chase. Hiccup laughs at their antics, but smiles even more at the thought of the training he would put them through. Oh yes, payback would be sweet.

The crowd, which had grown to include just about everyone in the village, parted to let their chief through. He walked up to his son. Hiccup stiffened. "Dad, I know what you're going to say, and you can't."

Stoic looked at him like he'd just gone Zippleback. "Can't what?"

"Can't make me stay."

The crestfallen look that had graced his features so often this past week passed over his visage again, and this time, Hiccup saw it in its full glory. He was about to take the words back when his father opened his mouth. "I'm not going to. Whatever you decide, it will be your decision. You know enough about those by now to handle yourself."

And suddenly there were two spindly arms around the big man's middle, squeezing for all they were worth. His manly pride could jump in the sea. Stoic put his arms around his son and hugged him back. Then he released his rider of a son and gave Toothless a pat on the head, something that made Hiccup reel for a moment. Okay, something had obviously happened between those two while he was in the forge, and it looked like something good. That made going through with his decision a whole lot easier.

Astrid walked to the forefront of the crowd, with Elena next to her. They'd many talks over the last few days, mainly about Hiccup. The blonde had done more blushing than she cared to admit. But the enchantress was finished ribbing the girl Viking. She had business to conclude. Stepping forward out of the crowd, she addressed Hiccup. "The deal is completed, with one exception. Do you have an answer?"

Hiccup smiled. "How's this for an answer?" He let out a piercing whistle, and the clearing was suddenly full of four other dragons.

Elena smiled at the boy in front of her. He had chosen the greater of his two possible destinies. "Then I suppose you'd better get busy training your Viking friends. As of now, our deal is complete and I hope the next time I see you, you'll be in better health than the first time."

"I hope that when I next see you I'll come as a friend, not a customer." They both laughed at that.

Hiccup went over to the Monstrous Nightmare and whispered something in its ear. It snapped its head around to stare at a slightly scared Snotlout before pouncing. Snotlout raised a hand in self-defense and looked away from his oncoming demise.

And then there were warm scales in his palm.

The former bully dared a look at his hand and saw that the dragon had its snout pressed against his fingers, purring contentedly. He looked to Hiccup for a little guidance and his cousin motioned to give it a scratch with his other hand. Snotlout reached under the row of fangs and ran his fingers over the creature's jaws. The purring intensified and its pupils expanded even further.

Astrid stares at the contented expression on Hiccup's face at the sight of the now bonded pair and turns to Elena once more. She smiles and confirms, "Like I said. He only wanted to help." Astrid can't help but agree.

By the end of the day, she had a new best friend, her nadder Stormfly. The twins wrangled Hiccup into giving them the zippleback and Fishlegs somehow ended up with the gronkle. Just as Hiccup was teaching them how to say goodbye so the dragons wouldn't follow them home, Stoic entered the ring. "I see the dragon training seems to be going well."

"Oh, yes." Hiccup replied, a smile lighting up his face. "In fact, these guys can pretty much handle their dragons without me tomorrow. So you and I can go find one for you and Gobber."

Stoic laughed. "I think I'll wait to go dragon hunting until I'm a little more like this."

"You just gestured to all of me."

****And so we come to the end of our story. It's been a great ride, guys, and I will write the companion piece, but keep a lookout. I just finished the ninth book of the series, and have another wild idea brewing. Keep yourselves posted.****

****On the saddle, I skipped directly to the second movie's version since I don't know how he could have flown without an ankle. Any other questions can be answered through PMs.****

33. The Nest: Reactions

****These next chapters are not a continuation of the story, but rather some missing information from chapters 19-25. During those chapters, I wrote the movie scenes that happened in my story. Because of the**

new material, I was unable to show the Vikings' reactions to several key parts of the plot, namely the Read Death and the loss of Hiccup's leg. The following chapters are their corresponding reactions to the information in chapters 19-25. Feel Free to PM me with further questions.**

"Leaving." Stoic watched as his son put down the heavy basket onto the mossy floor of the cove and called for his dragon. He hung his head. How could he have pushed his son to this point? What had he done?

But a sound jerked him out of his self-pitying session. It was the dragon's warbling. He looked back up at the screen and saw the way the dragon moved against his son, nudging and gently head-butting him as Hiccup inspected the flight gear. The bond brought a smile to his face, then a frown as he thought of how the Viking culture would have torn them apart.

A candle lit in his head. Maybe this wasn't entirely his fault. Given, it was mostly his fault, especially after what he'd said that day in the ring, but the world they lived in also played a part. In the Berk that existed before Hiccup left, and probably the one that did now, Toothless would have been killed the moment he'd been found. Toothless was, probably, _hopefully, _at least one of the reasons Hiccup had left.

This was good. It meant that, if he ever saw his son again, he could tell Hiccup that Toothless was welcome in the village and that, if he chose to stay, his friend would not be hurt. All he had to do was get his son to stay on the island, and he would have a chance to make things right with his genius of a son.

The next moment between the dragon and his rider bolstered this hope. There had been so much regret and even some sorrow in that voice as it told Toothless to take off. Hiccup had not wanted to leave. He had been forced to, which meant that he and the rest of Berk had at least some sort of chance to get him back.

Berk prided itself on its sunset views. The craggy mountain foreground with all that color in the back was a wonder. But Gobber felt distinctly cheated when Toothless flew above those brilliantly colored clouds and gave Hiccup the view of a lifetime. And it wasn't just the view.

The smith looked down at his peg leg. He hadn't been truly free to do as he pleased since he'd sustained that injury, along with his missing hand. Sure, he'd found ways to work around it, but things like dancing and finer balance were beyond him due to the nature of his stiff, unyielding prosthetics. A different model might have afforded better movement, but the one he used didn't, and it hurt sometimes.

But Hiccup had found a way to get away from that sort of limitations. His dragon was crippled, and yet they still had the freedom to fly and enjoy no limitations. Oh, Gobber wanted that again, that unbridled freedom that made you feel like you could do anything. He had to get himself a dragon.

_Who wanted to remember a grounded, downtrodden life when all the sky was at your fingertips? _ Who indeed.

Then he let out a startled noise and Toothless dived down into a foggy area. But then he almost laughed. Only Hiccup would be disgruntled with his dragon in the face of such danger. The grin was wiped from his face as the other dragons came out of the fog. This was dangerous. If even one of those beasts saw Hiccup, the lad was done for.

Then Stoic shouted and stood up as Hiccup entered the mountain packed to the brim with dragons. "It's the nest! Hiccup found the nest!"

Gobber pulled his friend down with a whisper of "Quiet! It's not over!" The boy's next remark made the smith smirk. How well the boy knew his father.

Then the two men watched, shocked, as they came across the conundrum of the food dumping Hiccup had found so puzzling. _Why on earth were they doing this when it was probably hard enough to catch food just for themselves?_

Stoic gripped the tabletop from his nerves. Something wasn't right here. He watched as the gronkle flew over the mass of smoke, or was it fog. A moment later, it didn't matter, because a beast of absolute power had just risen out of that and ate its kin. Stoic wanted to reach into the screen and get his son out of there. That beast was too dangerous for his son to handle. He and his dragon had to get out of there right away.

"We gotta get out of here, bud. Now." They took off and the beast made a lunge for the odd pair. A splintering sound filled the Mead Hall. Gobber looked over and saw that the edge of the table had splintered in his friend's grip. Stoic only let go to inspect the splinters of wood in his hand when both his son and his dragon friend were safely out of the mountain.

And slowly, realization dawned on the Viking faces in the big room. Hiccup had been right, and not just about Night Furies. He knew dragons weren't dangerous. In fact, if they took out that queen, making peace with the beasts was a real possibility. _That beast was the force behind the war between the dragons and Berk. It had to be stopped, and the only way to do that was to kill it._

_So simple, and yet, so complicated. _The Vikings agreed, but for different reasons. It wasn't the strategy or forces that concerned them. No, they had to find a way to get to that nest. Hiccup had found it because Toothless was drawn to it through instinct. Maybe, if they tied a Terrible Terror to a mast or something, they could find the nest the same way. Then and there, Stoic decided that, after this image was finished, he'd start rounding up a crew to go and hunt for a dragon to lead them to the nest. But it would be so much easier if Hiccup was there to help.

_The only way to get both was to go back to Berk and try to make the rest of the village see sense. _Oh gods. Hiccup had thought the exact same thing, except the other way around. What if when he came back to try to convince them about dragons, he was really trying to get help to defeat that massive dragon? Why hadn't they at least given him a chance to explain instead of targeting him right off the bat? Sure, he'd been a screw-up most of his life, but he was a wonder worker

with dragons. It should have been obvious that he knew something they didn't.

Several Vikings shook their heads at their own stubbornness. Dunderheads, the lot of them.

****First companion chapter, as promised. These updates probably won't be as fast as the others, since these chapters are a lot more difficult to write. I decided to just add it to the tail end of this story and not make you guys search for it.****

34. Released: Reactions

Astrid watched as the teen and his dragon set down in the cove and dumped their luggage. It hurt that he was prepared to leave, but his hopes that they would understand bolstered her spirits at least a little. Perhaps, if he didn't think they were completely hopeless, the next time they saw him they could convince him to come home. It was probably hopeless, since Stoic had disowned him. _Still, it was worth a shot. _

Even with the new respect he held for his cousin, Snotlout couldn't help laughing when Hiccup mentioned the levers. Then again, most Vikings couldn't move those things, since they'd been built with rampaging dragons in mind. Actually, Stoic might be the only one in the tribe who could do it, with his own father as a close second.

Then his cousin walked towards the Terrible Terror's cage, and Snotlout remembered the trick he'd used on the little dragon last time. But he wasn't holding anything shiny, and it was night. What was he going to do? Practice?

But then Hiccup's thoughts echoed through the room. _But, if they didn't and still insisted on learning how to kill them, these wouldn't be around to witness their efforts._ He was freeing the Terror, and probably all the other ones as well. He leaned forward over the bench. This would be something to see. How would his stringy cousin conquer the dragon?

But there was no conquering. In fact, it looked a lot like what had happened on the beach after Toothless' first real flight with Hiccup. It was like handling a slightly skittish pussycat, with how it leaned into his touch and fainted in his arms when he scratched its sweet spot. Releasing the Terror had been easy.

One down, four to go.

"He's going for the gronkle," Fishlegs whispered to his teenaged companions. Man, Hiccup sure knew how to pick a challenge. The beast rocketed out of its enclosure and a new voice suddenly filled the Hall. Low, but with a sort of warmth to it, it took Fishlegs a few moments to realize that it was the thoughts of the gronkle. She wondered where the target shields were and slowed down when she realized there was no danger.

Then she sniffed deeply, and her thoughts echoed through the Hall in that unexpectedly warm voice. "Where is that smell coming from?" She sniffed again and this time was able to target Hiccup as the source

of the lovely smell of leather, that wonderful grass, and the faint smell of charcoal mixed with dragon scales.

Needless to say, the teen was very surprised to learn that gronkles had such a great sense of smell. Was it an attribute of all dragons, or this dragon species in particular? He had to find a way to test this!

Then her pupils widened as Hiccup's hand brushed her snout. Wow! So all dragons could do that, not just Toothless. Did it express emotions? Certain degrees of pleasure? Did the dragons control their pupil reactions? Oh, there were so many questions that the teen could hardly contain himself.

But the way she and Hiccup acted just before he released her struck a chord somewhere in the big teen. The interaction was so gentle and nonthreatening. Was it just the smell and the fact that he was letting her go, or was there something more to it? Perhaps it had something to do with touching her nose scales. Oh, the curiosity was going to kill him!

Two down, three to go.

Astrid watched as he approached the Nadder cage. This was probably the second deadliest with the hottest fire in the dragon world, superb balance and speed, and some very nasty additions towards the back of the dragon. Was Hiccup going to play with it, or get killed by it?

Neither, as it turned out. The dragon didn't give him a second thought and ran off, or rather, flew off. But she couldn't help agreeing with Hiccup about its looks. With bright blue scales, golden spines around the head, and posture that reminded her of a bird, it was definitely the finest beast out there. Toothless might have been cute, but the nadder was more her speed. Hold on, what was she even thinking? It's not like she would ever get the chance to do anything but kill nadders.

Three down, two to go.

Hiccup walked towards the zippleback cage, contemplating various strategies. Stoic was almost beaming with pride. With a mind like that, his son would be a great warrior someday, perhaps even a general. Maybe when the boy came back, they could discuss strategy together. And Stoic refused to believe that he might not come back. He had to. Hiccup would not be another Valka.

Hiccup's plan worked like a charm and the zippleback went the same way as the nadder. Thank goodness for that. Those dragons were nearly as destructive as the twins on a good day, let alone on a bad one. Then he laughed when his son's thoughts sounded in his ears, mirroring his own thoughts.

_Four gone, one left. And this one was the monstrous nightmare.

-

The chief tensed. There was a reason nightmares were the prize dragon. Like Hiccup had said at the very beginning of whatever this was, monstrous nightmares were only for the best Vikings, for the reason that they were the most deadly type of dragon, for the sole

reason that their habit of encasing themselves in fire made it very difficult to land a hit until they ran out. And while you were waiting for that to happen, they could easily hurt, main, or kill you. How was his son going to handle such a volatile beast?

But the Nightmare didn't come out.

The beast of the dragon world wasn't coming out. What was going on? Hiccup, it seemed, was equally puzzled, but unlike his father, he decided to see what was up. And as he walked down into the arena and faced that monster's cage, Stoic's fear manifested in tense shoulders and fisted hands. What was his son thinking? That thing was probably just waiting to attack him!

And then Hiccup actually went into the cell with the dragon and put out his hand. The beast would snap it right off! But it didn't. Instead, it tried to get its nose to touch the outstretched palm, and Hiccup moved back, keeping about an inch of distance between the skin of his hand and the scales of the dragon.

Stoic's shoulders relaxed and the furrowed brows ascended towards his hair line. He watched as his son made the monstrous nightmare purr like a cat. There was no doubting it now. His son was a genius with dragons. _Now all five dragons were free. And there was one empty cell, door still open, which needed to be filled._

Suddenly, Stoic remembered the scene in the ring. He knew what Hiccup was going to do before he did it. Toothless, trusting his rider and it looked like best friend was going into the nightmare's cage to wait to wow the rest of Berk. If only Hiccup's grand plan had actually worked.

****Yes, I know this update took forever, but this was a seriously difficult chapter to write. That, and I have so many other ideas screaming for my attention. If you want to lowdown on my plans after this story is finished, PM or include a request in your review.****

35. Please, No: Reactions

When the image again changed, it showed Hiccup in what everyone now knew was his riding attire. A few of the women in the Hall laughed. No wonder everyone was asking about what they thought was armor. It was nothing of the sort. His solemn expression also made a great deal more sense to them. _There would be no in-between after today._

Many Vikings in the Hall cringed as they laughed at Stoic's speech, especially the part where he showed just how insane they all thought the transformation was. "I would have tied them to a mask and shipped him off, for fear he'd gone mad." But as tempting as it was to turn on their chief for saying such things, they didn't because they had believed the exact same things. This made Hiccup's thoughts even more fitting. _I've never been one of them and just at the moment they are all so convinced I've finally measured up to their standards, I'm going to throw that conviction on the ground._

The Vikings watched as the gates lifted to let the slim youth enter and slammed down right behind him, almost grazing his back as they came down. But, instead of the expected cringe, all Hiccup thought

was how those gates wouldn't hinder him and his dragon friend. Many pairs of eyes widened in the Hall. Just how strong was that dragon, that he could confidently take out gates that were built to restrain a rampaging nightmare and withstand a gronkle's blasts?

They watched as their memories played in front of them. At the time, it had seemed strange that Hiccup didn't go over to the weapon rack to arm himself. The spectators had written it off, thinking that he was brave enough to try and tackle the beast with his bare hands. His father had done that many times, so why not the son? Then Gobber cranked up the tree trunk holding the cage closed and leaned over the rail, expecting for the nightmare to come charging out, just like it did every year.

Then Toothless charged out and, now that the danger was removed and their views on dragons thrown to the winds, they could notice things about how the two greeted each other amidst the cries of "Night Fury!" and "Get down!" What they had taken as aggressive growling was actually a warbled hello. When Toothless thrust his muzzle towards Hiccup, it wasn't to bite him. It was so the teen had a good place to scratch him in greeting. And, where before they hadn't seen because they were too far away or busy preparing for battle, now they were close enough to see the smiles that graced both faces for that solitary moment. Then the moment was broken as the Vikings stormed the pair.

Vikings began shutting their eyes. No one wanted to see this next part. A few souls plugged their ears as well.

"Son, what are you doing?" Stoic covered his eyes with one hand, shaking his head. Why did he have to have so much horror in his voice when he said that?

"I am protecting my best friend." The teens looked at each other, ashamed, even the twins. That title should have belonged to one of them, not a dragon.

"Hiccup, that beast is a dragon! Vikings kill dragons!" Everyone in the Hall was downcast now. It was the mantra they had lived by, and it had made murderers of them all, if what Hiccup said was true and the dragons really were intelligent. Based on what they'd seen, he was right.

"Then I'm not a Viking!" _Clang. _"I'm a dragon rider! And if you're not willing to let me show you the truth about dragons, then I'llâ€¦" Spitelout wanted to hit himself. Thor almighty, why hadn't he let the boy finish? Because there was the prize of all dragons standing right in front of him and, rider or no rider, that head was going to be mounted on his walls as yet another thing his son could aspire to. How stupid that train of thought seemed now.

Then the reason for Hiccup's certainty in their escape became all too clear as one of the plasma blasts that devastated their mighty catapults on an almost weekly basis rocketed through the netting on top of the arena and allowed the duo access to the skies above. Some of the people in the Hall, particularly the women, marveled at their skillful dodges of the various weapons thrown in their directions. Dodging was a very useful skill for a woman, particularly when your husband had spent too much time in the Mead Hall.

Stoic listened, shamefaced, as Hiccup once again tried to make him see sense. But it was his own words that cut into his heart. "Those dragons stole your mother! You are a disgrace to her and to me!"

Valka, the one who tried to stop the fighting. Valka, who had also felt that there was more to the dragons than met the eye. Valka, who would have stood by their son no matter what shenanigans he'd gotten himself into. Valka, who was more like Hiccup than his son would ever know.

How dare he use the mother against the son.

"Dad, please—" Oh, how it hurt to hear the pleading in that voice now, even when he had driven the boy's hopes to the brink by mentioning such a sore subject

"Do not call me that! You are no son of mine!"

The snap was nearly audible as the last tie Hiccup had to Berk broke along with his heart.

For a few minutes the Vikings hung their heads as Toothless and Hiccup picked up their supplies and flew to a nearby island. Then he dismounted and started unpacking. It was when he stopped and gripped the lid of the basket that Gobber saw it.

It was the stance of someone who was desperately trying not to lose control of their emotions. The tense shoulders, gripping hands, and shaking all reminded him of those first few weeks after he'd lost his leg. He'd tried to act like nothing had happened, and gone back to work in the forge. But he had broken eventually, as Hiccup would as well.

Only he took a few moments, not a few days, and had someone to comfort him without judgment. Gobber felt a swell of affection towards the black scaly pussycat as he wound himself around the boy apprentice. Hiccup finally cried himself out and Gobber ached for his young friend. What he needed right now was something to take his mind off of things for a few hours, even if it was just—

Fishing. Looks like Toothless had had the same idea. And those added acrobatics were just the icing on the cake; a much better distraction for someone's suffering than just a hard work day. Yes, Gobber thought, Hiccup was very lucky to have a friend like Toothless. Now, if only he could find such a friend as well.

When Toothless helped Hiccup throughout the rest of the night, curling up beside him to sleep, easing the pain, Stoic's mood began to lighten. Thanks to that dragon, his son was having an easier time of it, and the distractions had any possible hatred from forming. Really, if they had any chance at all of getting his son back, it was because Toothless took such amazing care of him.

He would find other dragons to train. Of course he would. The boy was a genius with the Devil's Luck, the gods themselves would be hard pressed to keep him from training more dragons.

He would kill the Red Death. Wait, what? Hiccup was going after that massive dragon on his own? The crowd began to murmur, concerned

for the young teen â€"they couldn't very well call him a Viking after that- and his nearly impossible quest. What if he was injured? What if he died? Then they would lose him forever without even the slightest chance to make things up to him.

And then, when peace was a true possibility, he would find a way to get through to the Vikings of Berk. He would find a way to get through to his father. Despite the determined tone of the thought-voice, the Vikings rejoiced. He was coming back!

Then the jubilation died. If he'd been planning to come back, what was taking him so long? It had been two months already. Was he still training dragons, increasing his forces? Or had the battle already happened and they had lost, or Hiccup had been gravely injured? What if the teen had been killed, eaten by the monster of a dragon? Oh, the suspense was killing everyone, but many weren't sure they wanted to know the answer.

**One of the longest yet! You guys have no idea how difficult it was to write this chapter. It was like walking a tightrope, keeping away from Stoic bashing and still maintaining the guilty feel that it needed. I am so glad I don't have to write another chapter like this.
**

So enjoy it thoroughly.

36. Preparations: Reactions

The villagers watched eagerly as Hiccup flew from island to island, gathering draconic troops. The monstrous nightmares and zippiebacks still jangled everyone's nerves, especially when Hiccup got close enough to perform the first act of training, touching their snouts. The zippiebacks were especially tricky, since you had to please both heads at the same time. And with the nightmares' there was always the possibility that one would flame up while Hiccup was still touching it. The Vikings didn't want to think about what that could do to the boy, especially Stoic, because this was his son, and Gobber because he knew how much the boy worked with his hands. But despite these risks and difficulties, Hiccup got a fair few of these two species into his ranks.

Of course, their numbers were nothing compared to the nadders and gronkles. The women very hghly approved of his approach to the vainest dragon alive. In fact, if he used those tactics on almost any girl in the village, he was sure to have quite a few women after that heart of his. Although, the Viking Wives didn't see just how closely their husbands were watching Hiccup's work. But they would be certain to know after a few days of such treatment.

But with the gronkles, it was a flipside of the coin. Oh, that tactic of rewarding a job well done with a scratch stirred up so many ideas in the women's heads that the male population was going to be very busy giving out compliments and doing extra jobs around the house because of the promised rewards from their ladies. As it turned out, dragons and Vikings really weren't so different.

The fruits of these tactics paid very well, Gobber thought, with the number of verbal and whistled commands these two species learned. It made him question his own 'sink or swim' methods. The nightmare was a

large incentive, of course, but perhaps he could teach more specifics using these different methods. He even managed to teach the zipplebacks a few things this way, although he gave up on the nightmares from the beginning, a wise choice in Gobber's opinion. It was rather like how he only taught the twins the essentials, because their attention span wasn't longer for anything else, and tried but failed to curtail Snotlout's pride. He wondered, what would happen if you put the twins on zipplebacks and left Snotlout with a nightmare? They might just teach each other a thing or two about learning and following orders. Or it could make the problem worse. He shivered at the thought.

They watched with delighted laughter as one of the wild nightmares tried to get fresh with Hiccup and was immediately surrounded from all the bigger dragons from the ring. Hiccup had quite the dragon fan club now. But the laughter grew louder when Toothless shot a glance and the nightmare who dared to lay the edge of his wing on Hiccup's shoulder. They could almost hear him snarling "my rider."

But, as the dragon training sequence finished up and the mood in the film changed, so did the mood in the Hall. The training had taken less than a week, and Hiccup had said that he wanted Vikings and dragons to work together to defeat the Red Death. So what had happened? Why wasn't he back yet? Had he gone after the Red Death with just dragons? Had he been hurt?

Had he been killed?

But their thoughts were jerked out of their rather depressing turn when Hiccup began thinking strategy. Just like his previous experiences with Toothless and the dragons in the ring, Hiccup started to apply his knowledge of dragons to the Red Death. The first plan, to use the dragon's own fire against it, seemed brilliant to the Vikings. The twins' comment made everyone laugh, and the ones mentioned glow with pride. In fact, the Vikings were just about yelling at Hiccup to go with that plan right away, but that was before he started poking holes in it.

There were dragons that spewed things besides fire in defense, and there was no guarantee that this dragon was also vulnerable to fire on the inside. As Hiccup listed off the things that could go wrong, Stoic ached in sympathy for his son. He knew how that felt, to have to plan around unknowns, Hiccup himself usually being one of them. It was one of the burdens of a chief, to make such decisions. But when Hiccup ran his audience through his alternative plan, they gasped at the genius of it.

A cage of molten rock.

Indeed, why not trap the beast in its own lair? It matched his forces perfectly, with breath and fire attacks that could melt the mountain on top of the monstrous dragon. Although, starving wasn't a death a Viking would wish on anyone. They knew too much about it from those hard winters.

But this plan also had flaws. More, actually, than the gas explosion plan. The chief knew that feeling all too well, of having to weigh the costs of one dangerous option against the other. It was one of the things he disliked most about chieftaining, knowing that what he decided would affect the whole village, and that any errors in

judgment would be on his head. He just wished Hiccup hadn't had to learn that feeling so early on in his life. Then the words, Hiccup's thoughts, echoed through the Hall and left his father slightly breathless.

Was this how his father felt, when he had to make the big decisions for the tribe? Did he debate one solution over the other, trying to find an option where the benefits outweighed the risks? And what part had he played in those balancing acts? He was always messing up everything with his inventions, well-meaning or not. Several plans and options had probably been discarded because, while they were the best option, throw a Hiccup into the mix and they suddenly became that much riskier, that much more dangerous. No wonder his father had always been angry with him.

The others in the Hall turned to look at their Chief as the man sat on the bench, jaw dropped slightly and hands limp on the table. Was what Hiccup said true; was this the kind of mental and emotional strife the man endured every time he had to make a major decision? For a man under so much pressure, he did an amazing job. And maybe, just maybe, by the time Stoic finished making all the tough decisions, he didn't really have room anymore in his head for a plan wrecker like his son. It didn't eliminate his actions, but it did ease their severity. If Hiccup realized this and gave his father leeway because of it, who were they to hold past decisions against the man?

The gas plan, with less risks and more facts to back it up, won in the end, with Toothless, of course, taking on the most difficult task. Stoic smiled. Now that was the decision he expected from a future chief. The fact that the black dragon already had the necessary experience just added merit.

The thought Hiccup went to sleep with, that after this he could go back to Berk and help his Viking family discover the joys of dragons, heartened everyone in the room, but also made them worry. _If it didn't work, well it wouldn't matter, because he would be dead. _ Hiccup wasn't back to Berk yet.

So what did it mean?

****And here we go, another reaction chapter. I couldn't resist the first two bits about comparing dragons to Vikings. Did you enjoy them?****

****I read the 11th Hiccup book today, and now I want to punch Cressida for that ending. How could she let Alvin get it?! I was screaming at the book!****

****We are a measly 6,000 views away from 100,000 views. Help me get there, people!****

****By the way, I'm planning on flipping another popular story on its head, by doing the insanely popular Big Four Hogwarts story, but in a way no one expected. Intrigued? Feel free to PM!****

37. Battling: Reactions

Oh, Misty eye of the mountains below,

Strange music filled the Hall as the Vikings watched the youth prepare for what was obviously the battle against the Red Death. As he donned his version of armor, light for flight but still durable, the Vikings were surprised by the somber mood. They were used to seeing battle as a glory and a sort of privilege, a way in which to fight and perhaps die that would bring glory to your name. But from the grim expression on Hiccup's face, he saw things quite differently.

_ If this is to end in fire, then we shall all burn together. _The song sounded through the Hall as Hiccup, surrounded by his dragon forces, made his way towards the mountain where the Red Death lazed. It was a magnificent sight, all those multicolored beasts flying together, just flying. Even if it was into battle. Especially since it was into battle.

Then, for a moment, they were thrown into the perspective of a dragon, one of the nadders. Humming filled its ears and images of the Red Death flashed before its eyes. Then Hiccup called out to it, commanding it to resist. Then the Vikings understood that the sound and images were the call of the monster inside the mountain, and that Hiccup had trained the dragons to resist, the clever boy.

As the view narrowed once again to just Hiccup and Toothless, the Vikings again had the chance to admire their movement as they dodged stalactites, made the hairpin turns in the tunnel, and in a few places tucked in their wings and shot like a bullet forward. To watch them move together was a hymn to the god Tyr, god of the skies and everything that flies in them. Perhaps that was where the night fury's origins lay, instead of with lightning and death. It was certainly a good enough flier for the parentage.

When Toothless emerged from the tunnel right next to the monstrosity's head, the crowd again gasped. With the intervening scenes and accompanying emotional roller coaster, many had forgotten just how big the beast was. But they were reminded quite brutally as the image showed the different entry points of the various species. This dragon was almost bigger than Berk! How on earth was a measly fire blast down the throat going to take this thing out?! But the size of the beast didn't seem to bother Hiccup, as he whistled the command for the gronkles to start spewing the molten rock.

Now that the mood of the scene had lifted slightly, a faster pace due to the nature of the action, the Vikings let loose their fighting spirit. War whoops, waving hands and various weapons, and stamping feet filled the hall with noise and motion.

Then it opened its other four eyes.

Not good.

"Oh for Thor's sake! That's just overkill!" someone in the Hall yelled, to the general consensus of the crowd. Then someone else yelled "Get in there, you nadders!" as Hiccup gave the signal and none of the expected dragons answered. People began yelling more abuse at the dragons, calling them idiots and lardbrains for not following orders, but were struck silent when the nightmares swooped in and dropped their flaming saliva beneath the monster's lids. The liquid nature of the fire made it nearly impossible to remove,

causing a great deal of pain and destruction beneath the thick skins of the creatures eyelids. Now why hadn't the dragon boy thought of that sooner? They laughed at Hiccup's answer. _Probably because he didn't think the Nightmares did anything but show off. Guess he learned something every day._

The dragon, in agony from its eyes, staggered around the cave, bashing its head against the walls. Astrid bit her lip as one smash came perilously close to nicking Toothless' tail. If any of the rig got hit, Hiccup and Toothless would be trapped on the island with the beast and wouldn't be able to carry out the plan without getting caught in the crossfire! That could not happen!

A few more slams of the giant head and Fishlegs heard the same hiss that came from the terrible terror what seemed like ages ago. _It was gassing up._ So Hiccup had been right. The Red Death did use gas, just like a zippieback and terror. The big blonde noticed how the dragons retreated down into their entrance tunnels without an obvious command from Hiccup. Was it instinct to get away when a dragon heard that sound? Or was the reaction specific to the Red Death? Whatever it was, it seemed to work, because none of the dragons got hurt when the gigantic beast unleashed an unheard of amount of flames. Fishlegs couldn't believe Hiccup had been able to calculate the gap when a possible death by fire had been just inches away. But he had. _The gap was big enough._

_This would work. _

Now Stoic saw how all the actions to this point were building this situation. It was blinded, grounded, angry, and a big blazing target. Just how they wanted the beast. When Hiccup whistled the command for his friends to get out of danger, he again smiled with pride. That was the actions of a leader, to get everyone you could to safety and leave the dangerous task to the most capable. For him, that had meant letting the other Vikings take care of a dragon's legs while he battled the business end. For Hiccup, it meant taking out the beast completely by himself. There was no doubt his son was brave, even by Vikings standards.

But still, that decision had a flaw. He'd also sent away the nadder backup shots he'd stationed above the Red Death's head. That meant that, if he and Toothless missed and the beast hit them, both would go down and the enormous dragon would eventually break free and wreak havoc once again. Yep, Hiccup was clever, but there was still a thing or two he could learn.

"This is it, bud."

The Vikings watched with loud cheers of encouragement as Hiccup wove around the huge beast aggravating it even further.

"There's no way you're gonna get Hiccup, you blasted behemoth!" just as the dragon made a grab for him with its mouth and missed.

"You're headed for the wall! Move to the left!" right before he made a hairpin turn and evaded the side of the mountain.

Then the whistling sound came again, and the crowd saw Toothless change direction. The cheering died in the moments before the strike. This was it. The shot went home and Gobber leapt onto the top of the

table, waving his hands and shouting, "That's my apprentice!" The noise in the Hall was so great that they almost missed the commentary that brought all of them back down to earth with a great crash.

But there was one thing Hiccup didn't account for. Such a massive explosion wouldn't just funnel out of the mountain through the tunnels and cracks, like he'd hoped. Instead, the pressure reached a volcanic level, and the whole mountain exploded.

Nerves jangled again as the pair wove and dived to avoid rock shards and other fragments. But just as they avoided a piece of mountain bigger than a Viking house, Hiccup screamed. You could have heard a hair drop in the silence that reigned as Toothless flew to the closest island suitable for the pair and Hiccup, after unhooking himself, looked at his leg.

Gobber put down his waving hands and stared at the severely injured boy. Stoic grew very still at the sight of his fifteen year old son with a wound that could kill bigger men. Then he fell, limp and unconscious.

Astrid screamed. "NO!"

And we have his finest hour and his worst moments, complete with reactions. I should never have let you guys bully me into this, it's too painful. But you can ease my suffering by reviewing, if you wish.

38. Wounded: Reactions

Panic reigned in the Hall. Stoic, the statue staring in horror and disbelief at the screen, was surrounded by Vikings screaming that Hiccup couldn't be dead, or railing at the dragons for causing this catastrophe. Astrid, the voice who broke the dam and unleashed the pandemonium, again reigned it in. "He's not dead!" The Berkians turned back to the screens and saw as the nadders gently situated him on the ground. If he had been dead, they would not have done that. So, slightly appeased but still very worried, the Vikings returned to their benches to see how things would play out.

The sky accelerated, marking the passage of the rest of the day and all of the night as the dragons Hiccup had rescued kept vigil with Toothless. It was almost touching to see how Toothless crooned to his young friend, how the nadders squawked in slightly subdued tones, all trying to wake the bleeding youth. As the night came to an end and the sun rose again, many Vikings turned away. It was rare for a warrior with a wound of that severity to last the night. They did not want to see the dragons dispose of the body.

Then Stoic let out a yell, jubilant and hopeful. "He's awake!" Benches were crowded again and people watched Toothless nudge his friend and Hiccup reciprocate the affection, suffering as he was. Their bond was strong. But the momentary reprieve wasn't enough, as he steeled himself and looked down at the injured limb. The thought-scream that echoed through the Hall as Hiccup touched the end of the shard made everyone flinch, even Mildew. But a few admired how he kept in from escaping his lips, for the dragons' sakes. There was a bit of mild chatter about the extent of the wound and whether or not it had broken the bone, when the next few thoughts quieted the

crowd with what can only be described as horror.

_The pain was only in the top half of his leg. The nerves had been cut. _

He was going to lose that leg if he didn't amputate the portion below the shard.

Moisture gathered at the bottom of Gobber's eyes and threatened to spill over. If there was one fate he would wish on no one, it was amputation. The loss of a limb, something that should always have been a part of you—well, it wasn't something you overcame in a day. Many saw it as an honor, to be so marked as a warrior, but it wasn't surprising that all the Vikings who thought that way were still intact. And no one had been forced to face that in their teen years and without the comfort of their village.

As Hiccup inspected the dragons around him, specifically their mouths, Mulch started to realize what Hiccup was planning. The youth didn't have access to the clean cut and proper medical treatment Mulch had for his hand. So, he was going to use what he did have, namely the dragons. But that was going to hurt a great deal more than a clean cut, with the left over skin sown together immediately afterwards, and with the patient knocked out. Would he even survive the procedure, not bleeding out, not letting the wound get infected?

_"__Gods, this is going to hurt,"_

Fishlegs would have gloated about the usefulness of his dragon facts under any other circumstances, but he kept his piece. Stoic was grateful for the boy's silence as Hiccup called over a gronkle and gave her and Toothless instructions. He was barely holding his emotions in check as it was, he wouldn't be able to resist snapping at the youth if he interrupted.

The town medicine woman started to cry as she witnessed a young, physically weak boy placing his leg in the gronkle's mouth and preparing for the pain by picking up a stone shard and placing it between his teeth. He should not have had to do this. Bites especially dragon bites, were some of the most painful wounds. He should have had a weapon, a sword or ax, to make the cut quickly and cleanly. But for all that the boy could craft such weapons he was still useless at actually using them. And dragons didn't like weapons.

As he gave the gronkle the signal, several others let the tears flow, many of them amputees themselves. The boy was about to enter a world of pain, and not just the operation itself, although that was enough to knock out Stoic the Vast. The first few weeks of healing, growing pains, the aches brought by weather changes, these things ensured that you never forgot what you lost, even if you replaced it. Then the dragon bit down.

The whole world echoed with screams.

Stoic finally let the tears fall, in such numbers that they darkened his beard with their moisture. Most of the women, quite a few of the men, and all the amputees let the tears trace rivulets down their faces as the gronkle pulled away and Toothless blasted the wound

closed.

Tender and gentle as they could make it, the dragons helped treat their friend and leader, and the Vikings thanked them for it. Toothless' steady gait, carefully even as he carried his best friend and the nadder's successful reading of his actions and gentle handling of the boy's arms all helped ease their suffering. At least Hiccup had some help with this.

There was another momentary panic as they saw Hiccup passed out again, but when the dragons set him down in the pond, easing the pain of his wound and showing the Vikings that he still breathed, their anxiety over the teen abated slightly.

When he woke from the cold, the crowd's anguish had lessened somewhat. The sobbing had died down to the occasional hiccup, although faces were still very wet all around. A few even managed a chuckle at his sarcastic remark about burns and smith work, including Gobber. But still, he was glad the boy had the knowledge, hard won as it was.

As the boy stripped off his riding vest and shirt for bandages, the medicine woman noticed how pale he was. But whether it was from blood loss or the cold, she didn't know. She hoped it was the latter, but when he tried to tear the shirt, she found it was the former. This was not good. If he stayed in that state for too long a time—well, she had to hope the dragons would help him get the nutrition he needed to build up his blood supply again. Luckily, the treatment for burns and stumps seemed to agree on bandaging. It kept out infection and sheltered the wound from abrupt changes in temperature. But first he needed those strips!

Toothless bounded to the rescue. Gratitude welled up in Stoic as he saw the night fury using those deadly claws in a healing act. It seemed that every time that dragon popped into the picture, he became more indebted to him. Yes, the dragon was a him, not an it, with a personality, emotions, and capable of caring for someone. And those feelings only grew as he watched Hiccup lean against his friend's scaly side to bandage what was left of his leg. It was a rather touching scene, even if he would never admit it. He was still a Viking, after all.

It was a relief for everyone in the Hall when he finished with the bandaging before nightfall. Everyone except the amputee population. If Hiccup let the wound get too cold during the night—but they didn't need to worry with a draconic best friend so close.

— "—Oh, so this is how you're gonna be, huh bud?" Toothless let out a dragon chuckle.—

A few Vikings laughed at the comment as tension finally broke. Despite their fears, the process had gone as well as could be expected, and with plenty of caretakers making sure the whole thing went somewhat smoothly. But still, they couldn't help wondering what had happened after that. Where was the lad now?

****Why must I write such painful chapters? I agonized over this for two days! (So don't complain about it taking too long. I will not be nice.)****

****That said, we're one (probably very painful) chapter away from the end. Tell me what you thought, where I could have made it better, and really, just anything you'd like to say. ****

****On a happier note, we hit 100,000 views! First story of mine to every hit six digits!****

****After this is finished, I have three or four long term story ideas, but I can't decide which one to try out first. So, go to my profile page and pick which one I should work on first, using the poll!****

39. Recovery: Reactions

The next scene began with Hiccup blinking awake and the relieved sighs of half the Vikings in the Hall. The boy had made it through another night, making it almost a certainty that he would survive the ordeal with his foot. His puzzlement over the canopy earned a few chuckles, especially when the boy himself laughed at his friend's antics. They really did act like the best of friends.

Then the terror flew into the image and, to Stoic's mild surprise, none of the Vikings tensed. Well, it only made sense. Around Hiccup, and possibly other Vikings, the things were no more dangerous than a cat. But at the moment, this one was acting more like a dog. What was that thing in its mouth?

It was a bunch of sticks.

As Hiccup glanced between the pile and his new stump, Gobber could almost see the gears in that head of his start to pick up speed. Oh, yes, Hiccup had a problem to solve and all the prompting he needed to get to work. But, judging from the expression on the teen's face, he would have to halt his ideas and take care of his injury first.

It still looked awful, but it could have been much worse. There was no rotting smell, the flesh that wasn't black was a healthy color, and the flesh that was black seemed to be flaking off. There also weren't any signs of infection, so the water of the pond must have been at least moderately clean. And a good thing too, since that water was the only thing Hiccup had to wash the bandages and the wound.

Mrs. Hofferson noticed how gentle his hands were on the open wound, and glanced over at her husband. Was he capable of the same touches, if she perhaps coaxed him a bit? But those thoughts dropped out of her head when she caught sight of her daughter. Hiccup had been head over heels at the beginning of whatever they were watching. And she knew her daughter wasn't interested in any of the other lads her age. She looked back at the image, where Hiccup was bandaging himself again. A dragon rider, future chief and gentle man was a very good catch. If he came back, that was. She hoped he would, if only for her daughter's sake.

Gobber thought that, once his leg was taken care of, he would start on his new project. But no. His apprentice had to have the right tools first. The smith chuckled to himself. That boy might look harebrained from the outside, but when his inventing process was highly methodical, with plans, material gathering, and tool gathering

even before the project started. So of course the boy wanted to get back to where most of his equipment was. _The problem was getting there._

The tail fin was operated by two foot pedals. He now only had one foot.

But he skipped the emotional stage and went right to problem solving. Stoic grinned. His son seemed more and more like a chief, although a chief also had to learn to make do with what he had and not try to run from a situation to get better equipment. He'd have to teach Hiccup when each action was appropriate. You couldn't run off to get a better ax in the middle of a battle, but for something like this, it was acceptable.

Flying with his hands didn't have the fluidity his prior motion did, since it was harder to see, but they still managed to reach their camp without major problems.

He got up on his right leg and Toothless plodded over, letting the boy pull himself up onto the dragon's back. Slowly, the teen worked his hand into the pedals and heard the telltale snap of the fin as he tilted the one on the left side. This could work. He just needed to hook himself in, and that meant getting the harness back on.

The Vikings wondered what he was doing for a moment after he crawled into the tent, then laughed when a fish came flying out, an action that intensified when Toothless began catching the tossed food midair. One minute the animal was acting like a cat, the next it was positively canine. The big beast should make up its mind!

The scene cut to where Hiccup was sitting in the tent, a piece of dried meat in the corner of his mouth and his supplies and tools laid out in front of him. The wood from the terror, leather from his arm guards, leatherworking tools, and smaller blacksmithing tools were laid out in front of him. His thoughts about shredded leather and hole-boring filled the hall, making the twins wonder. Is this how Hiccup built those machines that caused so much awesome damage, like the time he almost set his house on fire trying to come up with flameproof clothing? Wow. It was surprisingly boring.

_The only thing he was missing was something he could attach the leg to and that would also be comfortable for his new stump. _

Gobber looked down at his own leg. He'd used the centerpiece of a shield as a beginning, and widened it until it fit his stump. He'd done the same for most of the Vikings on Berk, who said the metal helped cool the wound during the healing process but was murder during the short summer. What would Hiccup use? He got his answer when the youth pulled out a drinking cup that, luckily, fit his leg stump almost perfectly. _Thank Odin he was so skinny._

He watched with pride as Hiccup used the skills Gobber had handed down to him to craft his own leg, and a very nice model at that. But still, he couldn't take credit for all of that. The weaving on the bottom was entirely Hiccup's idea, as were the two supporting pieces on the side. But it didn't stop him from yelling, "I taught him that!" with no small amount of pride.

As Hiccup marked the passage of time by whittling notches in a

leftover stick, the Vikings started to realize that they were getting closer and closer to the present. Tension started to rise. Would he fly off, never to return? Would they perhaps see him making preparations to return to Berk?

The question was still unanswered when the walls went dark and the talking stopped. Stoic sat back on the bench aghast. Stoic whispered, "Why did he do all that?" Go through all that trouble, that battle, that pain?

"To help you and the dragons." Stoic turned in his seat and saw Hiccup standing in the middle of the Mead Hall, one arm over the Night Fury Toothless.

Thank you for riding "A Twist in the Story". Please unbuckle your seat belts and depart in a satisfied, but slightly sad manner. Or, get back in line for another go. For other rides, please visit the author page to pick which one you would like to try next. Once again, thank you for riding "A Twist in the Story".

40. The Next Big Thing

The poll has decided, even through only three people actually voted.

**Beauty and the Beast **will be the next multichapter story I publish, but it may take a while since I want to do what I did with this story, by giving regular updates. This means I'll map out the story and write at least six chapters before I actually post anything, but keep a lookout for it! This is now up and running. I wrote the first three chapters in a day! Man, I couldn't wait to post!

An just because the other stories weren't voted in doesn't mean I won't be writing them on the sly. **The Hogwarts Four **will not wait for long!

Love you all, and thank you for your boundless support for this story.

41. And the Story Continues

This story is being embellished and added onto by another superb author by the name of mypettaylor1. If you would like, go check out her version of this tale under the title of "How Does Knowing Change You?". Please enjoy the adaptation, and give her the same encouragement you gave me while I was writing this.

End
file.